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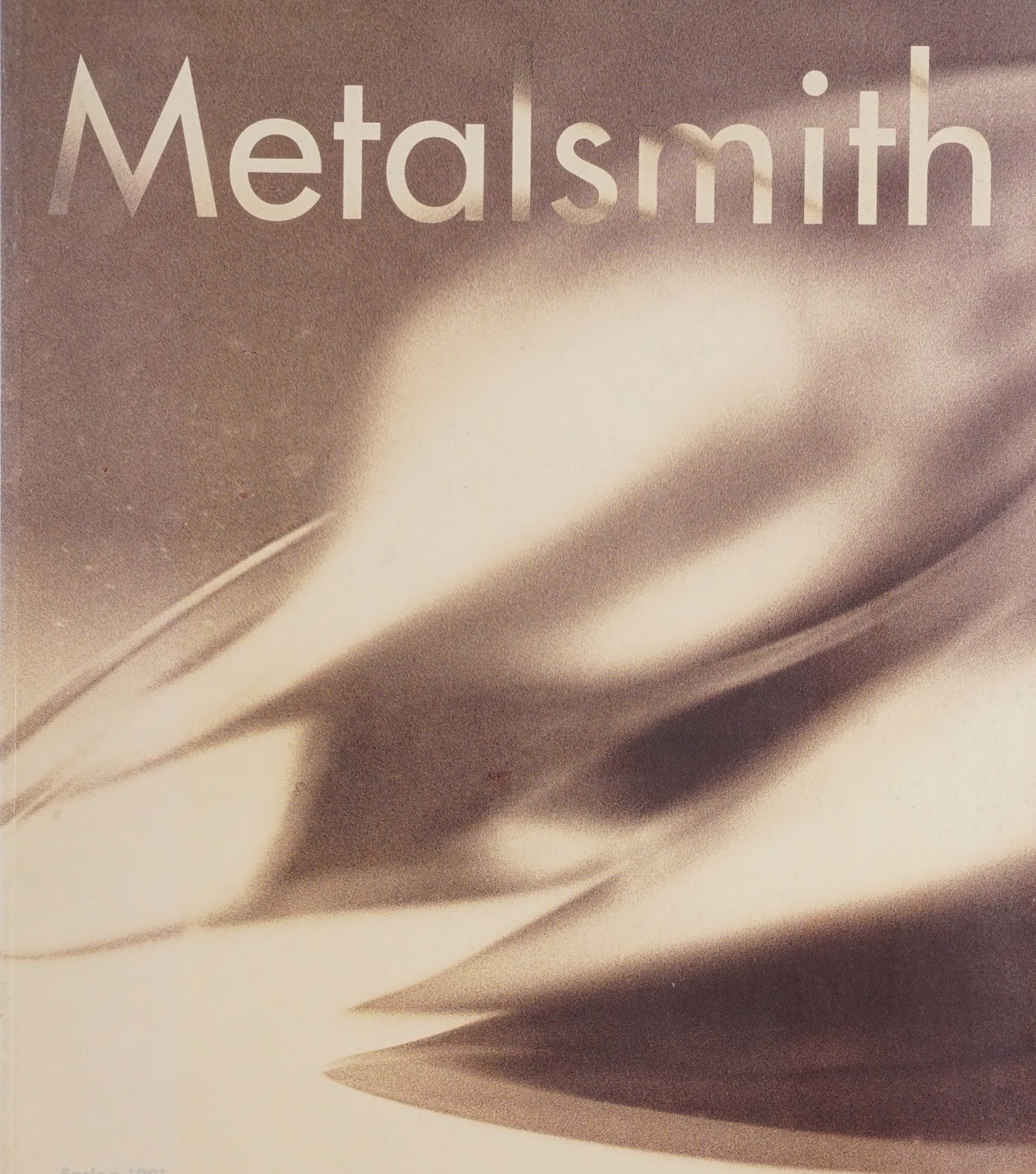

Spring 1991
Volume 11 Number 2
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Tom Markusen
Pattern Vase and Pattern Bowl
steel with patina and copper with patina
36 x 12 x 14" and 10 x 36"d., 1990
Figure 5, see page 24

Photo: Joe A. Watson

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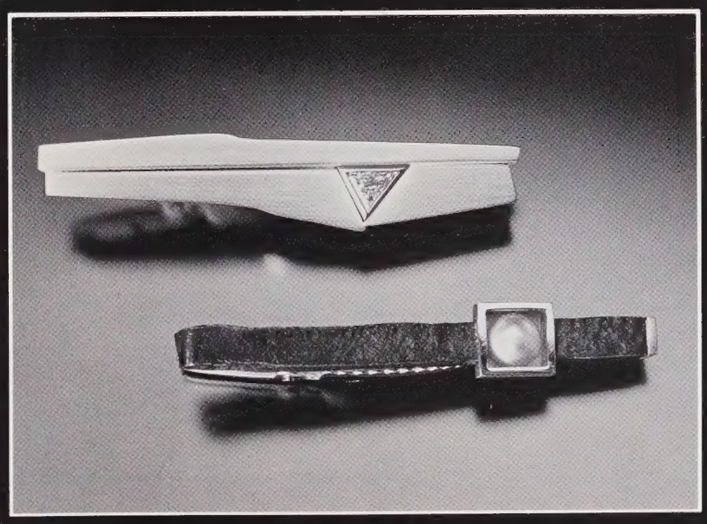

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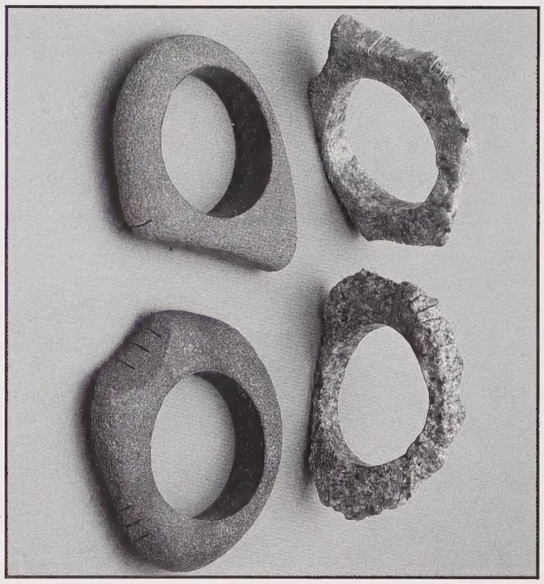

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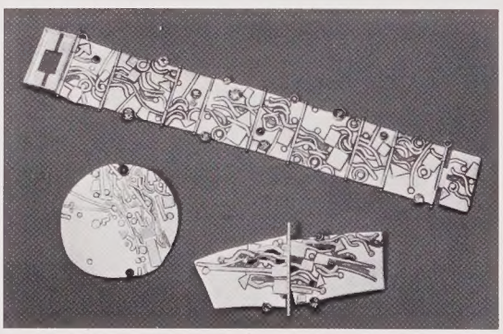

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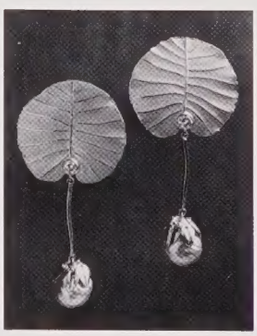

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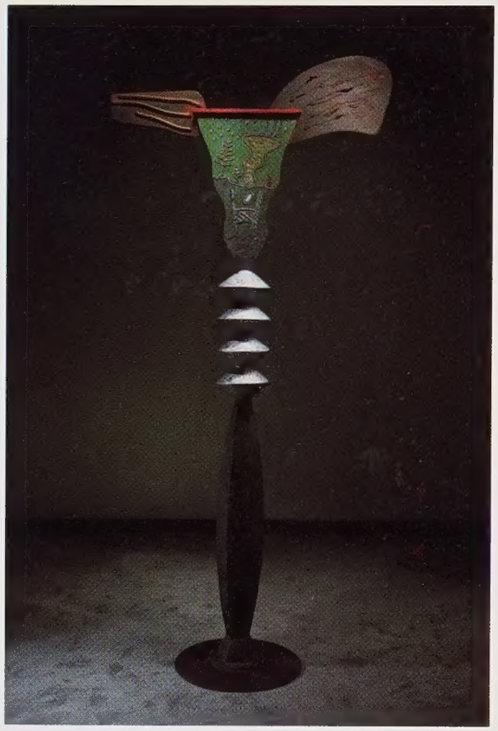

Robert Griffith, *Ritual Vessel I*
steel, gold leaf, prisma color, paint sticks and patina; fabricated, 98 x 50 x 20", 1990
Collection: Peter Hoffer
Photo: Ward V. Roe. See page 49

Departments

Editorial 4

Letters 6

Art & Technics 8
by Curtis K. LaFollette

Recent Sightings 10
by Joyce Clements

Cover
Ted Muehling, *Large Pod Earrings* (detail)
vermeil, 24k gold on silver, hand-folded from silver sheet, wire pulled down – all from one piece of silver, hollow, 3" long, 1979
Photo: Don Freeman. See page 20

Features

Rezac Gallery: Conceptual Relationships 16
an interview with Lisa Bernfield Ben-Zeev

Ted Muehling: Sensual Punctuation 20
by Vanessa S. Lynn

Focus: Tom Markusen 24
by William Baran-Mickle

Mary Ann Scherr: A Profile 28
by Blue Greenberg

Benchmark: C. Carl Jennings 34
by F. Jack Hurley

Wendy Ramshaw's "Picasso's Ladies" 38
by Gail Brown

Reviews

William Baran-Mickle 42
by Ron Netsky

Joan Parcher 43
by Myra Mimlitsch-Gray

Philip Sajet Jewelry 44
by Lenore Miller

Peter Chang 45
by Vanessa S. Lynn

Silver: New Forms and Expressions II 46
by Janet Koplos

Thomas Mann: New Work 48
by Anne Crowley Tom

Robert Griffith: The Belin Works 49
by Matt Povse and Sandra Ward

The Glorified Goblet 50
by Susan Barahal

Jewelries / Epiphanies 52
by Edward S. Cooke, Jr.

John Baltrushanas: White Winter 54
by Teresa Callahan

Editorial

Long overdue, a survey of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's impressive holdings in modern decorative arts objects from 1890 to 1990 has recently appeared in print. Compiled by former curator of 20th-century design and architecture R. Craig Miller, and sensitively photographed by Mark Darley, this selection of 125 "masterworks," is a convincing testament to the extraordinary range and depth of the museum's collection.

Masterwork status is candidly discussed in an opening chapter called "Perception of Design," which states that the difficult choice of an object for a particular category, of which there are 10 including metalwork, was sometimes arbitrary. Mr. Miller goes on to explain the rationale behind the use of the word design to cover the wide range of objects in the collection. The author divides design into three sections: "Decorative design is defined as objects conceived by one person but made by another; these are generally handmade in limited production, and such luxury items constitute a large segment of the collection. Industrial design likewise consists of objects conceived by one person but made by another, but these products are intended for mass production. Both divisions imply an intellectual process whereby ideas are transferred by a series of drawings to the fabricator. Craft, on the other hand, constitutes a third division, where the objects are conceived and made by the same person, often simultaneously and as one-of-a-kind pieces." Perhaps even more revealing is the context in which the developments of modern design are viewed in the eyes of the Met. Mr. Miller cites four major issues that have confronted modern design artists: "the fascination with new technology and mass production, the study and adaptation of historical styles, the concern for the relationship of humanity to nature, and the ephemeral but often influential crossover from painting and sculpture to the applied arts."

We have not seen such an in-depth look at this powerful and influential design collection since the 1979-80 issue of the Met's quarterly *Bulletin*, written by Penelope Hunter-Stiebel, then Assistant Curator of Twentieth Century Art. That publication, with its lavish, double-page spreads of Ruhlmann desks and Hoffmann inkstands, whetted our appetites for an introduction to further treasures in the collection, part of which at the time was enticingly installed on a portion of the second floor of the museum and became a pilgrimage site for makers and collectors alike.

During the 1980s, a number of contemporary craft objects were acquired or given to the museum, as illustrated in the current volume. These include a tour-de-force gold and en-résille bowl by Margret Craver and a large electroformed, silver-plated copper, centerpiece by Chunghi Choo, Michael Jerry's cooking pot and Claus Bury's necklace, both from 1975, as well as Albert Paley's preliminary elevations of ironwork for a stairwell enclosure for the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress Hotel in Orlando, Florida.

For metalsmiths, there is a pride in realizing that both front and back covers of the book illustrate metal objects: Jean Puiforcat's teakettle, c. 1923, and Paul Lobel's tea service, 1934, respectively. And while it is reassuring to see a major metropolitan museum publishing on and occasionally exhibiting the metal objects in its storerooms – most recently, the Met participated in mounting "Design in America: the Cranbrook Vision," 1984, which included the work of Arthur Nevill Kirk, Eliel Saarinen, Harry Bertoia and Richard Thomas, and a solo exhibition of the pioneering work of Marie Zimmerman, called "Art and Craft in Metal," 1985 – the acquisition of these objects must accelerate. Occasionally, in strolling through the American Wing or on the way through the corridors to a "blockbuster" exhibition, one will see a coffee pot by Peter Müller-Munk, but a long-term aggressive program in the crafts area does not seem to exist.

As craft history emerges as an independent field of study, now, at the end of the 20th century, it is important to remember the words of John Cotton Dana, founder of the Newark Museum and a revolutionary curator. In 1917, he wrote, "The genius and skill which have gone into the adornment and perfecting of familiar household objects should receive the same recognition as do now the genius and skill of the painter in oils. Paintings should no longer be given an undue share of space and on them should be expended no undue share of the museum's annual income. It is doubtful if any single change in the general principles of art museum management will do as much to enhance museum influence as will this placing of the oil painting in its proper relation with other objects."

Modern Design 1890-1990: The Design Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with text by R. Craig Miller, was published in conjunction with Harry Abrams, NY.

– SB

Metalsmith

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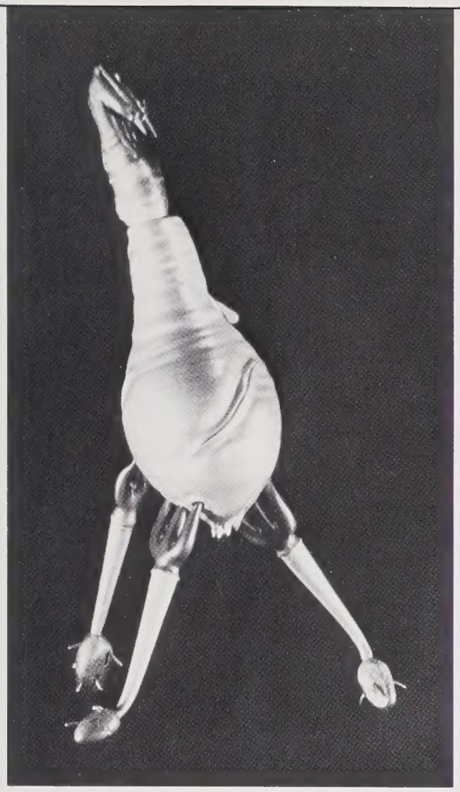

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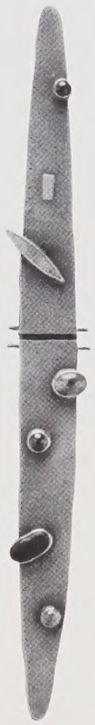

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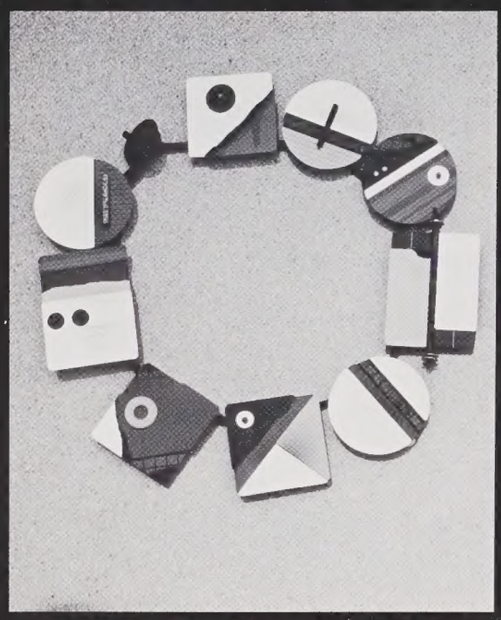

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Letters

Dear Editor:

I read with immense indignation Falk Burger's letter to the editor in the Fall 1990 issue of *Metalsmith*, and, although I suppose you must present conflicting points of view, I did not expect to see such crass, hollow ignorance grace your pages.

There are, of course, just that: jewelers. I do not disparage this fact; it is their absolute right to follow that prerogative and the market that comes with it (fashion). But it is utterly unjust to expect every jewelry-making metalsmith to follow in the rather staid footsteps that have defined jewelry in the past. Many artists, such as myself, have chosen to work in the field of jewelry not because of the market (which really does not exist, as Garth Clark confirmed, for art jewelry) but because of the intimacy such a medium affords. When the work is smaller, the artist's involvement with/in the work is part of what is conveyed in a given piece. There is a distance one feels when viewing, say, a large sculpture; the relationship of the artist with/to their medium is more apparent in smaller works, and often part of the message, I believe. Also, the intimacy of relationship is extended via jewelry to/by the wearer. When an art jeweler puts out a piece of work it is because s/he wants to extend that relationship, and if the wearer is willing to make a certain, shall we say, commitment to that piece, then the relationship is extended via another human contact.

An art jeweler does not just see jewelry as a limited means of expression (just gems and gold) that limits the perimeters within which s/he has to work. Jewelry is often the chosen medium of these artists because of the vast range of materials which can be utilized within the discipline. Also, they do not consider adornment to be the primary element dictating their work - "accessory" denoting the secondary nature of such work. Many an art jeweler's primary motivation is exploration and expression of their aesthetic and conveying the artist's own, personal vision is often the point. However, if one does not have a strong, unique vision, working within a genre such as jewelry that brings with it the effect of a preestablished aesthetic (however hackneyed) that has already been defined is, indeed, comfortable. This can justify the work of a jeweler who has chosen to stay within the limits that have always defined jewelry. They may also engage in the work because they simply like the "look" or the market that comes with it. But why did Burger have to phrase his letter as an *attack* against art jewelers? And why would one have to be so adamant about the idea that jewelry *cannot* be art? If an artist has a strong, individual voice, whatever medium s/he chooses is utterly justifiable if s/he can make their voice speak within it. Whatever Burger's anger and frustration stem from is a problem for him to grapple with, and if he chooses to extend the art world's often very conservative and limited viewpoints to justify his own, he is perfectly welcome to succumb to their argument, but those of us who do have something valid to say do not need the ignorance apparent in such a narrow mind to stand in our way. We have enough battles to deal with in trying to get our work accepted for its true worth without finding that opposition in the pages of *Metalsmith*.

I, as well as many other art jewelers, labor in relative obscurity, knowing that I must pay the rent via my day job. Choosing to bear this "burden" has been an exercise of my free will, an exercise of choice. No one made me become a jeweler, and cruel fate has not cast me into this role; I have chosen it for my work, for my art, which is its own justification. Of course, I would like the art world to accept my work, but I do not believe that recognition is forthcoming. I have chosen my work because, as Rilke has said, it is my truth, I have no choice but to heed that truth.

Lastly, I will cite concrete examples of this truth in the work of Eva Eisler, Pavel Opocensky, Lisa Spiros or Lisa Gralnick. If the findings were taken off their work, it would still stand on its own and bear the brunt of art world competition, *without question!* There is power inherent in their voices, *force*, the voices of artists that speak with no shadow of doubt.

Claire A. Dinsmore
Rocky Hill, NJ

Dear Editor:

What a pleasant surprise to open the cover of the Fall, 1990, issue of *Metalsmith* to see the work of my mentor and friend, Hal Hasselschwert. The companion article, written so well by Tom Madden, capped off my smiles. It was with great sadness that I learned of Hal's sudden death way back in June. We will all be left without his richness in art and life now that Hal is dead.

I was one of those lucky students during the early sixties (1962-66), at Bowling Green State University, where Hal and I first met in Beginning Design. Later I worked with Hal in jewelry classes for the next three years. He was an inspiration to many and an incredible jeweler and metalworker. He brought the same richness to his classes that he did in his enamels.

It seems fitting that such an article be written in a major magazine to discuss and display the works of an American Treasure, a person who got this type of publicity so late in his life, and, if he had not died so suddenly, he would have retired in 1991, with a great way to go out, with the very special article in *Metalsmith*.

Thank you for presenting the piece on Hal.

David LaPlantz
Professor of Art, California State University
Arcata, CA

Dear Editor:

It has recently come to my attention that *Flexane*, a urethane material, which I have been using and recommending preparing for use in die forming, contains compounds that are potential carcinogens (see "Hydraulic Die Forming for the Artist/Metalsmith," *Metalsmith*, Summer, 1985). The September, 1990 issue of *Acts Facts** reports that two-component urethanes are among the most hazardous materials used by artists.

I exhort all metalsmiths to stop using *Flexane* to prepare pads and contained blocks for use in die forming. Dangerous toxins are released during the mixing, pouring and curing of this material. Air-purifying respirators do not provide adequate protection.

It is safe to continue using the *Flexane* pads and blocks you may already have. There is no danger once they have cured. And there is good news if you are just getting started with die forming. The company making the new hydraulic press Bonny Doon Enterprises is also offering a wide variety of urethane pads and contained blocks. These products are being made to my specification and are being distributed by Frei and Borel (1-800-832-0355).

Susan Kingsley
Carmel, CA

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Correction

The text of the article on "The 10th Limoges Biennial of Enamel" in the Winter, 1991 issue, should have stated that Limoges was celebrating its 2000th anniversary as the city of the "Arts of Fire." Further in that article, Soviet enamelist Birouté Stoulgaite is a woman. The list of invited participants should have included Francoise Coté-Frico, Québec, Canada, and James Doran, a sponsored participant, is from Vancouver, Canada.

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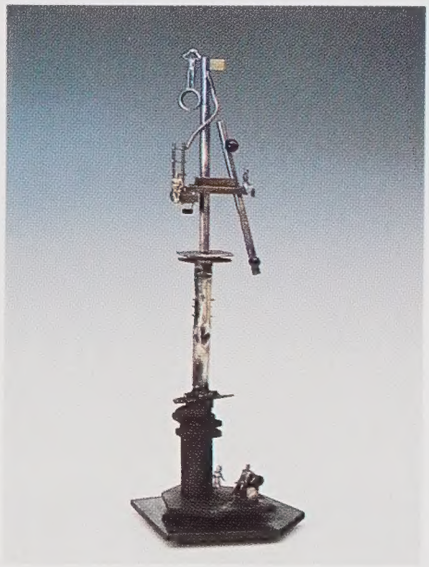

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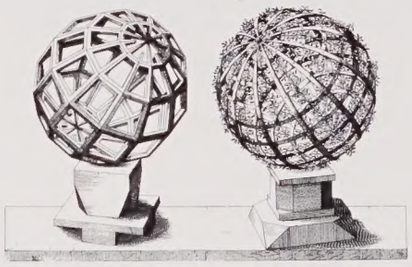

Wenzel Jamnizer
"see-throughable" globes, 1568

On October 12, 1984, I was attending a conference on mathematics, "Visualizing Higher Dimensions," at Brown University. As I was about to enter Sayles Hall to hear a paper presented by Rudy Rucker on "The Further Adventures of A Square", a colleague handed me a stack of photocopies with illustrations of some of the weirdest geometry I had ever encountered. That was my introduction to Wenzel Jamnizer (1508-1585). As I examined the reproductions later that day, it became clear why they had been given to me. A number of the platonic solids had been skeletonized, so that as his text describes them they were "see-throughable." These engravings bore an eerie resemblance to the neoconstructivist sculpture I was producing in steel and aluminum at that time.

I wanted to know more, but the text was in an archaic southern German dialect. Fortunately, Professor Bob Warnock from Brown University was familiar with the dialect and provided me with invaluable translations. It was then possible for me to evaluate Jamnizer's contributions to the Northern Renaissance.

Wenzel Jamnizer was born in Vienna but moved in 1534 to Nurenberg, where he became a master goldsmith. He executed many praiseworthy commissions for the German Imperial Court and was especially adept at the production of high relief on vessels through the use of repoussé. He was respected as a master among masters at a time when Nurenberg was the preeminent center for goldsmithing in the German-speaking principalities. He was also instrumental in the development of the table clock, a 16th-century German innovation. In addition, he was a skilled bronze caster who maintained the continuity of the German tradition of sculpture until the mid-century mark when he began to adopt the court mannerist style typical of most of the rest of Europe. He also developed a reputation, as Albrecht Durer had before him, as a keen theorist, sharing in the development of the intellectual life of northern Europe. He was equally interested in Euclidean geometry, which had disappeared from the European consciousness during the Middle Ages, and perspective, the quintessential development of the Renaissance.

The development of perspective can be traced all the way back to the 11th century, when Alhazen, a mathematician, writing in Toledo, recognized the fundamental error of Ptolemaic perception theory. Unlike Ptolemy, he states correctly that light reflects from an object to the eye, whence it is perceived. Alhazen's *Optics* was translated by Lorenzo Ghiberti in the 15th century and the foundation for perspective was laid. Alberti published *Della Pittura* in 1435, and Piero della Francesca followed in about 1482 with his *De Prospectiva Pingendi.* In 1506 Durer traveled to Italy to learn "the secret art of perspective" from the study provided by these Renaissance masters.

Durer (1471-1528) was another Nurenberger who had studied goldsmithing before he became a printmaker and painter. He had reached the height of his esthetic and intellectual power while Jamnizer was still working to become a master. Durer's work in perspective was published posthumously in 1532, the same year Jamnizer achieved his master status.

With the publication of *Perspectiva Corporum Regularium* in 1568, Jamnizer demonstrates his mastery of geometry and perspective. While he uses conventional mathematical procedures of truncation and stellation, he transcends the production of simple mathematical models in the innovative way he applies the processes. He has also succeeded in creating a strong dynamic tension between the implied kinetic energy of the figures and the stability of their bases.

Perhaps the most eccentric of these figures are the "see-throughable" globes, two of which are reproduced here. The one on the left is a masterful rendering of structural elements. Most interesting is the interruption of the structure as elements converge at the poles, creating an opportunity for some visual variety as well as a better look at the inside of the form, while at the same time clearly violating the purity of the mathematical model. The figure on the right reflects an ever greater deviation from mathematics. A strange concoction of latitudes and longitudes trellising biomorphic vines, it is totally unclassifiable.

There were others who continued to tinker with the Jamnizer perspective apparatus, and those who continued to develop mathematical objects in and around Nurenberg during the 16th century, but no one else produced a volume of such elegance. Nor was there another work from this period that so succinctly summarized the accumulated knowledge of perspective or geometry. Jamnizer remains a significant intellectual and esthetic figure, an exemplary goldsmith.

Thanks to Bob Warnock, a professor in the German Department at Brown University for his translations of the Jamnizer texts.

Curtis K. LaFollette is Professor of Art at Rhode Island College in Providence.

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by Joyce Clements

Fine Jewelry: A Feminist Perspective

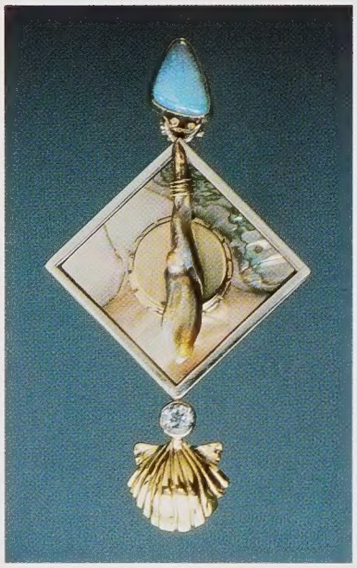
Before becoming a jewelry designer and goldsmith I was a sociologist. In the late 70s, I left behavioral science to follow my need to create, to use my hands and to indulge in the beauty of precious metals and gemstones. Along with two friends, I opened a design/jewelry store where, perhaps unconsciously, our feminist values showed in our approach to retailing and in our one-of-a-kind products. This store remains the primary retail outlet for my work, but at least half of my time is devoted to commissions.

Those who buy my jewelry reinforce my belief in the gender-related nature of jewelry and design. I feel that the way I find my clients and the way I work with them represent a departure from "the norm." But before I elaborate, the sociologist in me insists on a "framework" – hence the pedantic background notes that follow.

In contemporary Western societies, the traditional mores regarding precious gems and jewelry have dictated that women wear "fine" jewelry more often than men – and more of it as well. In most cases, the jewelry worn by women has been given to them by men.* This arrangement not only underscores the favored economic status of men as providers but also emphasizes their control of discretionary giving. A man's act of bestowing is essentially the proffering of a contract. It is tacitly understood by the "parties to the transaction" that a woman's acceptance of the gift serves as her consent to form or renew a commitment to some level of personal agreement, obligation or compliance. To both parties, the consequence has immediate and anticipated long-term reciprocal value. In addition to the testimonial joy of giving, the giver gains social recognition for the observable value of his gift and for the affectionate assent its acceptance implies. The receiver gains the talisman of personal esteem as well as an ornamentation of recognizable value and beauty, which enhances her visual appearance. At the same time, her adornment serves to display the attentive devotion of a partner or admirer, thereby confirming her social value as a female. (Not unimportantly, the gift of gold and gems also represents an actual commodity transfer to a woman, increasing her personal wealth and status.)

These mutual exchanges of confidence usually manifest themselves in predictable designs. Engagement, wedding and anniversary jewelry, along with most other gifts to a beloved, display a narrow range of possibilities: a simple graphic arrangement of gemstones or symbols such as hearts, bows, locks, flowers or animals. The design choice generally belongs entirely to the giver; it is his "indulgence" and the factors that influence his decision are respected as appropriate.

As women have gained economic stature and the power that comes with it, their own purchases have given rise to the concept of jewelry as a form of self-affirmation: defensible gratification, meritorious reward for accomplishment and commendable selection of the attributes of social status. Realizations of "I am my own woman" and "I am successful" have led to recognition of independent identity and assertion of artistic confidence. Decisions about jewelry – what kind it will be, where and when it will be worn, what esthetics it will represent, what colors it will include and how much money will be invested in it – are more and more frequently the owner's option and the owner/buyer is a woman with her own design choices. With this growing category of jewelry buyers, the parameters of design have expanded.



Joyce Clements, *Ancient Echo I*
18/14k gold, sterling silver, topaz, abalone, opal, pearl, 1989

Almost all of my clients are women buying jewelry for themselves. They individually and collectively represent a spirit of liberation and freedom to which I respond with respect and exuberance. The words that I hope would be chosen to describe my work would also describe my clients – beautiful, strong, intriguing, evocative, challenging, ebullient, original, skillful. These women come from all walks of life. Many are connected with colleges and universities; many are corporate executives and health professionals. Some are artists and musicians and small business owners. Some are tradespeople. Several are lawyers; two are judges. Others are in less remunerative positions. Many have survived and surmounted personal challenges often associated with relationships to men in business or family. In common, these women customers choose to herald themselves with jewelry and they have the confidence to choose out-of-the-ordinary designs.

How are such designs developed? The method I use actively involves the client and produces what I believe are singularly distinctive pieces. Initially, I meet a client at her office or home, preferably the latter. I like to see the art and style with which she surrounds herself. After a few moments of conversation, during which I learn a little about the person and listen to a bit about what she has in mind, I explain my perception of jewelry design. I think of my skills and knowledge of gemstones and metals as a reservoir from which to create sculptural forms that are conceptually provocative, dynamic in feeling and still essentially wearable. I do not meet a client with preconceived notions about what techniques and design elements should be incorporated in this woman's jewelry. The resultant piece may be fabricated, cast, formed or "all of the above." Accordingly, each client interaction is just as open and new for me as it is for the client.

Using a Caramate slide projector, I then begin a portfolio presentation of 80 slides I think are representative of the kind of work I have done and still like to do. I ask the client to look at the slides twice – the first time I make a fairly quick pass through the portfolio and ask the client to identify which pieces she has a positive feeling about and which pieces she does not. This process serves the client by reassuring her that I am a competent jeweler and designer and that I can do so many different types of work that she is not likely to get stuck with something she doesn't like. (Of course, I have already reassured her that no design will be executed until she has approved a drawing, a mockup or a wax model.) By the conclusion of this first round, I have a fair idea of what forms and methods the client will probably like. The second, refining round proceeds much more slowly around an in-depth discussion of preferences. I try to stretch the client's imagination by stressing design elements, options in colors, textures and forms, and by asking for the **maximum** dimensions that she will enjoy. By my attitude and suggestions, I invite, if not almost dare, people to go as far as they can with their hopes and expectations for the piece. In the course of our dialogue (which lasts about an hour), we mutually determine if we want to work together. If I do not want to make what someone envisions, I will recommend another jeweler. Our success rate, however, is quite high: the client has the assurance that she will have my total attention and receive a piece of jewelry as fine as those that she has liked in the portfolio, and I will have the opportunity to create an entirely new object based on techniques and design elements that I like and that are energized by the input of an interested and vital person.

Like other artists and craftspeople, I find my inspiration in myriad sources. In commissions, what I come to know of my client serves as one of these sources. I enjoy "intuiting" a person's spirit and having that breathe life into a conceptual design. When I see the client again, I find the presentation of the promised mockup, drawing or wax model design to be an exciting and anxious moment. There is a definite thrill in presenting the "factualization" of my intuition and the creativity that I feel has its sources in our collaboration.

I attribute this type of dramatic, interactive art experience to the expansion of feminist consciousness and economic power. When people, women or men, are able to surpass the restraints of sexism, racism and financial hegemony, when they are able to develop their inherent and potential value, then they are in a position to push out their boundaries and to exalt their own creativity.

**In this article, I am referring only to what we call "precious" or "fine" jewelry – jewelry incorporating gold, silver or platinum and diamonds and/or colored gemstones. Less expensive jewelry, commonly referred to as "costume jewelry," opens up the doors for self-expression through ornamentation and expands the latitude of the "meaning" of jewelry; but it is not governed by so many shibboleths regarding its gift and receipt.*

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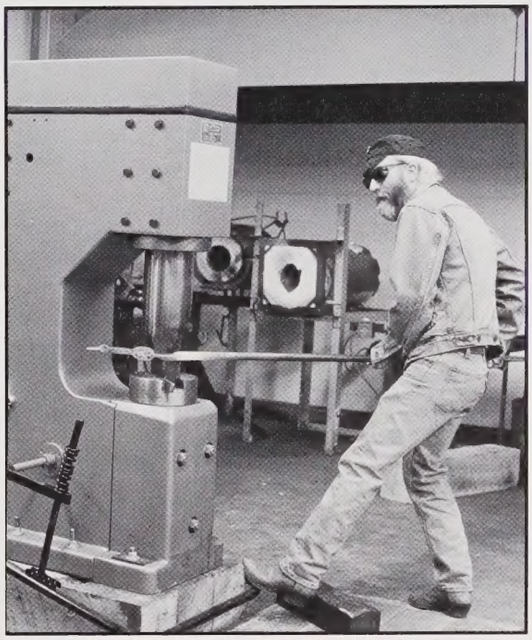

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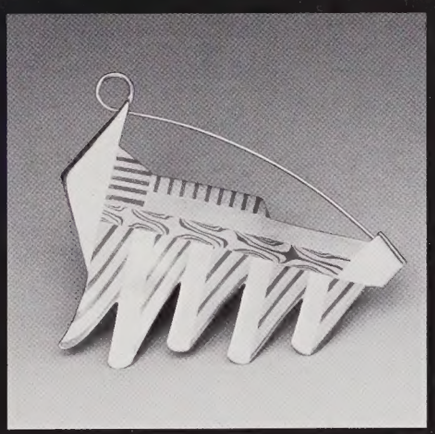

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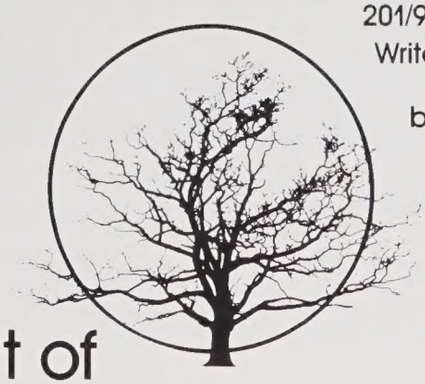

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Rezac Gallery, a space devoted to avant-garde jewelry and decorative arts, opened in May, 1988 on West Superior Street in Chicago. With the stated aim of identifying and promoting the conceptual relationships between fine and decorative arts, the gallery has aggressively pursued new territory, with an ambitious schedule of changing shows on a six-week cycle that includes the work of European and American jewelers and artists. Chicago jeweler Lisa Bernfield Ben-Zeev spent an afternoon recently talking with gallery owner and director Suzan Rezac in an effort to provide insight as to her stance and assessment of her goals to date.

Rezac Gallery Conceptual Relationships

What prompted you to open a gallery?

I was trying to make a living as a jeweler and had to do production items that weren't very interesting. I found that situation rather frustrating. I wanted to do interesting work and show it in interesting places. Looking at galleries I noticed a lot of wrong things – poor presentation, overcrowded cases, not getting paid and so forth. I know enough jewelers who were feeling pretty much the same way about the gallery situation. That's why I decided to open a gallery. It was basically to satisfy a need and try to do a good job.

Do you consider your gallery to be a jewelry gallery and what is your philosophy in showing jewelry?

No, I don't consider my gallery to be "a jewelry gallery." I do show jewelry but I also show other things. Now, for example, I'm having a weaving show. The next exhibition is going to be jewelry, and the next three exhibitions will be contemporary fine art.

The reason I ask is because I think most people would consider it to be a jewelry gallery.

Well, it may appear a strange agenda to show jewelry and fine art, particularly because the fine art I like to show has a conceptual bent, but I just try to consider the gallery as a space to show whatever is good art without any restrictions. It's actually a part of the philosophy of the gallery to fight against the idea of specialization. I'm excited about many art forms, so why not show them? The space is big enough. Also one of the problems with jewelry is that there aren't enough jewelers to have one-person exhibitions or even group shows every month.

Well, there are a lot of jewelers out there.

Believe me, there aren't that many excellent jewelers in the world, and that's actually one of the reasons I look in other countries besides the United States.

Why do you show jewelry in the first place?

This was my training. I love it. I think that it's a very interesting art form. It has incredible potential. It has not really been discovered by a wide public.

Why do you show predominantly European jewelry?

Well, first of all, I don't show only European jewelry. Yet, the jewelry from Europe is very good.

In that case, what is your criterion for selecting artists? What kind of work do you find most beautiful or interesting? What are some of the things that intrigue you? Maybe that will help to explain why you're showing predominantly European work.

The work has to be good. The criteria for something being good is very vague. What's "good" to me might not be what's "good" to you. The ideas have to be interesting, the work well executed, well thought out. I also want the artists to have a professional attitude towards their work and towards the gallery space. I should emphasize that the space is very demanding. To have a one-person exhibition of jewelry in 1400 square feet is not so easy.

Are there any particular artists (not necessarily jewelers) whom you most admire, and are their influences a basis for your choosing the people you choose? You definitely have a certain "Rezac" style.

I don't really see that.

I see you as showing more minimalist work.

Hmmm, that's not true. For example the work of Daniel Kruger is not minimal.

Someone like Otto Künzli is very concept-oriented and also very tongue-in-cheek. Most of the work you show has a lot of wit.

Yes, I am interested in ideas and in concept. This is maybe a personal preference – the notion of convincingly materializing an idea fascinates me. But I am also interested in the decorative or ornamental.

I guess what I'm saying is that one can see someone like Eva Eisler here more than someone like Jamie Bennett.

I had an Otto Künzli exhibition immediately followed by a Daniel Kruger exhibition. There is a tremendous difference in the work. Daniel is more interested in the decorative aspects than Otto is.

I'm trying to get you to set some parameters as to why some work fits in and some doesn't.

I don't work with recipes. I don't know beforehand what fits in and what does not. When I look at work I don't have a predetermined idea. I don't follow a scheme. I am trying to stay as open-minded as possible.

Let me go on. Does European jewelry have its own esthetic, i.e., minimalist, well-crafted, a virtuosity of technique? Could you characterize European jewelry?

Well, there seems to be a more minimal esthetic coming out of Europe. But there is well-crafted work everywhere and poorly crafted work everywhere.

There is also the issue that Europeans are not offended by the term "goldsmith," but Americans are?

I don't understand why Americans are. Maybe because it is an old word. One should be proud of where one comes from. Goldsmithing has been a respected profession in Europe for centuries.

So you don't think European jewelry necessarily has its own esthetic?

No, it is not possible to generalize. If you look at the work of European goldsmiths you will notice a tremendous difference in concerns and esthetics from one individual to the next. For instance, a lot of the jewelers I show are graduates from the Munich Academy, and it is striking to see how different the work is from one person to the next, yet they can have graduated from the same class.

Still on the differences between American and European jewelry: where does European jewelry fit in the continuum of the arts? What is its status? Is it a separate entity or does it blend in? Does it share the same burden that American jewelers face – the art vs craft, second-class citizen dilemma?

With all the studio visits I do in Europe I have found that the subject of "Is jewelry art?" never comes up. The European goldsmiths seem to be clear about what they are doing; they are not obsessive about categorizing it.
In response to your other question: "The grass is not always greener on the other side." The problems are similar. The attitude of artists or museums towards the jeweler can be condescending, as some people or institutions are incapable of viewing jewelry outside of a fashion context.

As a follow-up: Why do you think European jewelers have their own museums to showcase their work where American jewelers lack serious collectors and museum representation?

I think that this has to do with the state's sponsoring system. They have tremendous opportunities with grants, and the museums in Europe are state-run, which, of course, gives more power to the curator to pursue his interests without needing the approval of a meddling board of trustees. However the "fine arts" have, as usual, better opportunities, and the distinctions between what is "decorative" and what is "fine" are the same, and it is simply taboo to mix the two.

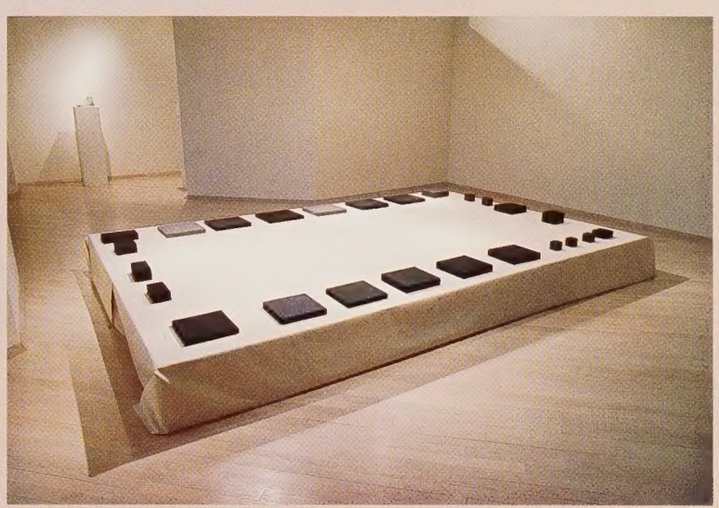
But your gallery is just doing that.

Yes, but I am not doing it because I think that jewelry is art. Jewelry cannot be fine art because it is jewelry and it has to deal one way or the other with its inherent functional aspect. What I am trying to say is that jewelry is as legitimate and can be as powerful and as interesting as painting or sculpture. Therefore, I find it absolutely essential to present jewelry with the same quality of display and with the same professionalism that one takes for granted in a painting or sculpture exhibition.

If we did have the galleries that would display the work in a professional manner or in an interesting way, maybe there wouldn't be this debate in the first place. Maybe we'd get serious collectors.

Maybe. This would be a first step, and it is what I am trying to do.

Gerd Rothmann
Installation views
1989



It's a long struggle. We've seen what has happened with ceramics and with glass, but jewelry is still lagging behind.

Yes, and we will not convince anyone by just proclaiming that jewelry is art; we have to represent it as art. There is a value in press releases, in well-designed invitations, in updated resumes and in documenting the work. All this is part of doing things right, and that is expected from any gallery but not usually found in a "jewelry gallery."

So, it's basically the same anywhere. Jewelry is jewelry. It comes from the history of the decorative arts. It has a different status from art, as it should. We can't compare the two; they come from different histories. The point is that both need to be displayed in a professional manner so that both can get collectors to buy and museums to represent them.

Yes. Although you can compare jewelry to art on some levels, you can't say "It is art"; you will have to prove that.

I even hated to bring up art vs craft in this discussion because it's something that I think is old hat, but it is obviously something that is in the back of our minds because we complain about not getting the same price range as the arts.

It is difficult to sell jewelry for its real value, and that problem is going to take a very long time to change, if ever. I wish that there were a lot more galleries dealing with jewelry and this issue.

I'm sure that you've been flooded with slides of work?

No, actually I am a little disappointed, I thought I would receive tons of slides and make great discoveries. I am getting more fine art slides than jewelry slides.

Most patrons would consider your gallery to show avant-garde, cutting-edge European work. Yet, the work being shown in Europe today is quite different. Do you consider the work you're showing to be avant-garde? How do you feel about the new guard?

The work that I show is definitely contemporary; all of the artists are alive – some well engaged in their careers, others just beginning. I am on the mailing list of most European jewelry galleries and I can assure you that similar work or the same artists are currently shown in Europe.

I see a lot of work stemming from the radical jewelry movement – jewelry that either skims the edge or crosses the line of what is to be considered jewelry and what is not. That's what I consider to be avant-garde. Some of Otto Künzli's pieces definitely are avant-garde. The Big American Neckpiece*, if it were to be worn, would certainly physically burden by its weight, not to mention its ideas.*

Yes, Otto's work is special – definitely one of the most convincing and successful "crossovers."

Or Gerd Rothmann?

Although Gerd Rothmann did make some object-oriented pieces in the past, most of his recent work is wearable and extremely seductive when worn. His is a concept that emphasizes all aspects of the body. Otto's recent work, on the other hand, seems to be moving farther and farther away from any traditional concern with wearability, except, of course, on a psychological level. He is basically an artist who deals with the theme of jewelry, and maybe that's the future.

Do you think he was influenced by the radical jewelry movement, by Gijs Bakker and Emmy Van Leersum or Caroline Broadhead?

No, I think that he is influential rather than being influenced. His work is not particularly derivative of any goldsmith.

Do you think work such as Otto Künzli's is acceptable as ornament or jewelry, or is it just work to be showcased in museums or gallery exhibits? What function does it serve?

I was just at a client's art opening and she was wearing a very expensive dress with Otto's *Wolpertinger* as a pendant, *Gold Makes Blind* as a bracelet and beautiful "bucket" earrings by Gabriele Dziuba. She looked great; obviously the idea of showcasing the work never crossed her mind.

The reason why I ask is because one of the critics of "The Jewelry Project" said that this more radical body-oriented work really only has its place in museums or gallery exhibits and can't really exist otherwise.

It can and does exist in homes. Owners of such pieces are well aware of the fact that they are difficult to wear and obviously purchase them for other reasons than comfort. They are willing to adapt the piece to their environment as they would a painting or sculpture. They put it on the wall or on a shelf. The jewelry piece becomes an object; the owner gives it its new status as a work of art.

What has the response been to this "jewelry" in Chicago?

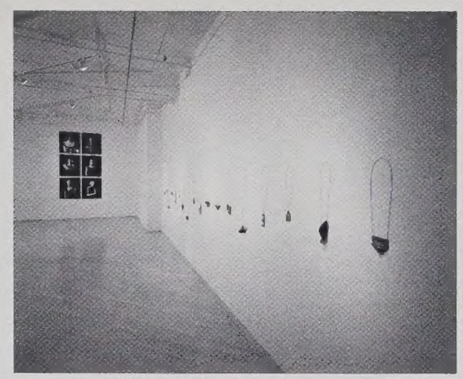
Most people don't care for it. The general public views it as something very eccentric, bizarre and amusing. They don't take it terribly seriously. It is difficult for most to get the point of it. But, there are curators, other artists and the few interested people who can appreciate it.

Would there be a difference in the response if this gallery was in Europe or New York City? In other words, why did you decide to showcase the avant-garde in Chicago?

Fate. I did consider New York but the rents were just too high. I'm not sure that I'd get a better response there. With the current status of the economy, I would rather open a gallery in Paris than New York.

No Americans, or very few, are doing the kind of minimalist work you're showcasing. Why do you think the minimalist, conceptual or body-oriented jewelry has not spread here?

I don't know. There are some young people like Rebecca Batal who do work that, as you say, is more European. Robin Quigley does more minimal, less ornate work.



Otto Künzli installation "Everything Goes to Pieces," 1989

One of the reasons I believe your gallery is so intriguing, aside from the work you're showing, is the attention to detail apparent in your displays, catalogs and concepts behind each show. What has inspired you? How do you come up with the ideas for each show?

About the displays, I think that it's sad to have built-in, permanently attached cases to the wall, not to mention the routine of filling them up with different items month after month. To create a unique display for every exhibition is one of the best ways to emphasize the work. I like the display to come as a surprise. The patrons don't walk in and see the same old cases. Instead they can always expect something new. I've found that it's better to suit the display to the show, rather than the reverse.

I recall the unique display used for the Gerd Rothmann exhibit. When entering the gallery one wondered if you hadn't set the show up or if you were in the process of it. One saw only a series of black boxes on the floor in the center of the gallery.

They weren't on the floor. We built something that looked like a large table, two-feet high, and covered it with a white tablecloth. The custom-made, black-linen boxes were laid, closed, around the table. When people walked into the gallery they thought this was yet another art installation, and if I didn't tell them anything, they would just look and walk out. So, I would have to tell them, "Please open the boxes." They would crouch down and open a box and were surprised to find precious jewelry inside. The funny thing was that they would open a box and then respectfully close it again. They wouldn't leave it open. They would open and close again and again until they had seen the whole show.

They would contain the preciousness by refusing to leave a box unopened.

Yes, and it was a lot of fun at the opening, seeing 15 people crouching at the table. It was an experience for them to have a direct physical contact with the piece – no glass in between. I was worried about security; sometimes I'm here alone, and it would have been so easy to take a box, The door is always open.

The idea for this display was Gerd's. I like it when artists have ideas about the installation of their work. I always take it into consideration. Most artists have a pretty good sense of space and how to work with it.

What has been your favorite display?

Therèse Hilbert's exhibit was also very beautiful, and so was Otto Künzli's.

What did you like about these exhibits?

For her exhibition, Therèse decided to build three-foot-long panels that were much longer than they were wide. We covered them with black silk and hung them onto the wall. On each panel she attached one silver pendant. So there was this strong contrast of black and white; it looked very elegant, almost austere. Except that in the back room we displayed the two pieces that were essential to the exhibition; a black *Rose* made in silver and the *Chain* that went with it, which was made from the cast thorny stem. These two pieces were presented on individual pedestals, one on red silk, the other on green. These were the only two accents of color in the entire show. One had to go behind a wall to see it and establish a relationship with the abstract pendants and brooches displayed in the front.

Your displays definitely add to the artist's ideas. They leave you thinking and they aid in what the viewer is going to get from the exhibition. Let's go back to the question about how you get the concepts for your group shows such as "Information as Ornament."

"Information as Ornament" was actually my husband and partner Kevin's idea. "Function-Non-Function" was my idea. The themes for the exhibitions come from discussions, reading or looking at work. Sometimes an artist proposes a good idea for a show.

How important is it to have a theme?

If you are going to mix fine and decorative arts the work really must be thematically linked. Otherwise, you run the risk of confusing people and looking like a supermarket.

How important is the catalog for each show and why do you get outside writers, sometimes more than one for the catalogs?

For the Künzli catalog, for example, I couldn't make up my mind. One of the writers was a very serious, traditional art historian and the other was a young freelance art critic. I thought it interesting to present both points of view. How do I choose a writer? I ask around. I call writer friends or artists and I ask them for recommendations. I tailor my choices according to the mood of the show. For "Function-Non-Function," I chose David Sedaris, who is a playwrite and has an excellent sense of humor.

How important is the catalog?

Very important and quite a luxury also. The catalog documents and outlasts the exhibition; in a sense the exhibition can never be forgotten. It's also good for the artist and for the gallery's image. But in terms of marketing, catalogs are useless; they are not designed to make sales. I give the same attention to catalogs as I would to display. We try to match the typeface and the layout with the artist's work and ideas so as to produce a coherent publication.

So your purpose in being here is basically to showcase good art and not necessarily to educate the public?

The public is not willing to be educated. Most people are very prejudiced and not inclined to have their minds changed. Of course, if someone expresses interest or has questions, I am always very happy to give an answer.

Is there anything you want to add?

I want to go back to the first question you asked me, why did I open my gallery? There just was nobody out there. I would make work and then what would I do with it? It was very depressing. One of the reasons that there are so few jewelry galleries is because it is very difficult to sell jewelry, There are few people who buy the work. Of the few so-called jewelry galleries, I am really the only one who devoted the entire space to a one-person show of jewelry, I don't show ceramics or glass alongside an exhibition, and I don't carry production lines. I don't try to play it safe. I am willing to take a risk. It is so powerful for an artist to have the entire space. It says, this is important and worth looking at.

Egret Clip
silver, cast, top and bottom riveted together with silver wire
through eyeholes with steel spring inside.
Through pressure on end of neck, the beak opens and closes to hold a scarf,
7" long, 1981. Photo: Don Freeman

by Vanessa S. Lynn

‘Ted Muehling Sensual Punctuation’

Before moving his studio operation to a ground-floor space in Soho, just last year, Ted Muehling lived and worked in a kunstkammer. His round-the-clock environment teemed with several thousand “found treasures.” Aside from the deliberate collections of shells, fossils, insects, and stones, there were bits of bones, snake skins, gracefully gnarled tree limbs, draped dried seaweeds, live birds, a Philippe Starck juicer and scads of stools and seats chosen for the pleasure of a particular curve. The unsuspecting visitor was assaulted. Muehling found it serene.

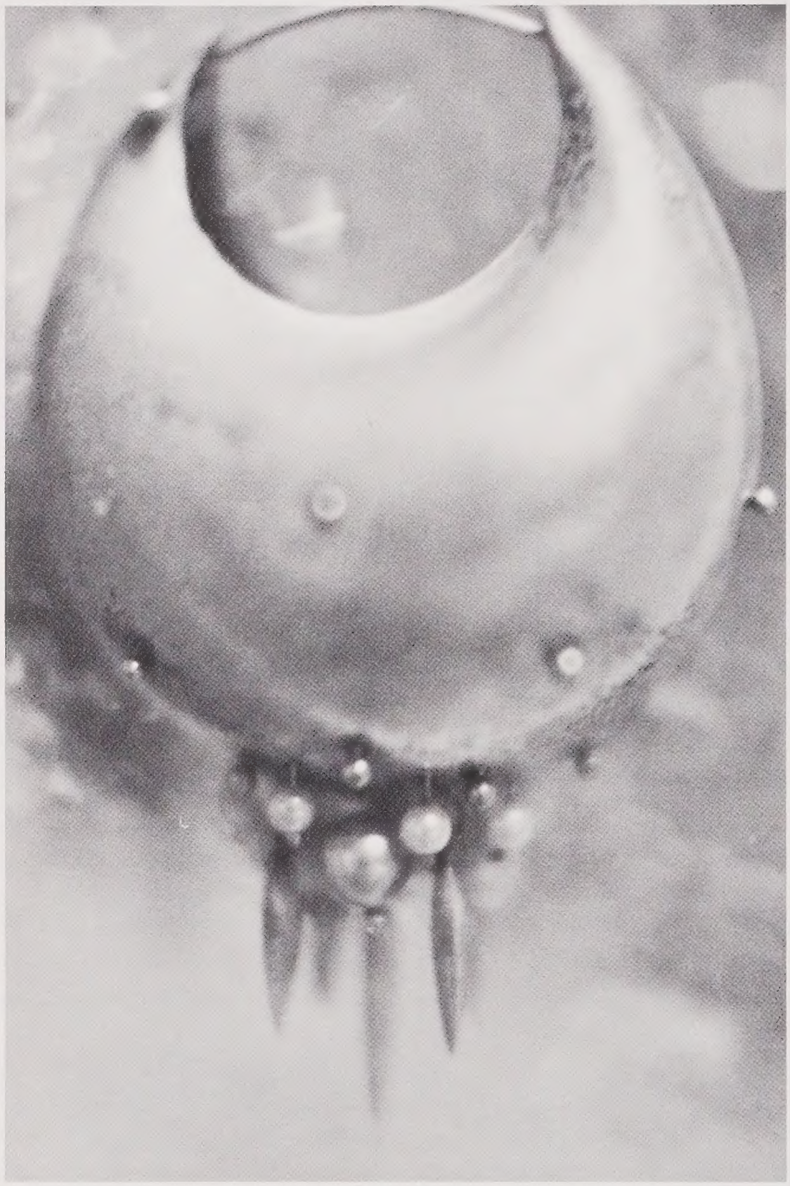
Large Pod Earrings
vermeil, 24k gold on silver,
3" long, 1979 – still in production
Photo: Don Freeman

It is neither unusual for artists to surround themselves with the objects they love, nor for them to be inspired by forms found in nature. Muehling, however, makes these inspirational essences the sinequanon of his daily experience. He has placed himself within a grandly scaled collector’s cabinet on the order of those assembled in 17th-century Europe. Like his historically acquisitive predecessors, his goal in owning these myriad wonders is to know them, control them, tame them. For his purposes, Muehling has succeeded.

There is a singular, minimal sensibility that occupies Ted Muehling, whether applied to jewelry, candlesticks, vessels or walking sticks. It is rooted in nature. Without exception, his variation on a form seeks to isolate and celebrate the essence of a softly sensual, convex curve that continuously stimulates him. His permutations evolve from a preoccupation with the simple grace of the organic ovoid – eggs, pods, acorns, pine cones, almonds, melons, snail shells. Abstracted and sized, articulated, colored, patinaed, punctured and repeated, they never feel repetitious. It is a form that piques universal response, one that resides at the core of our own psychic nature.

What makes his natural abstractions different is, in part, his education as an industrial designer (Pratt Institute, 1975.) In fact, he loathed his only jewelry class, failing to finish a single assignment for it. But he relished the tenets of design and the discipline’s challenge: make it beautiful and make it work well.

Never shackled by the pressure to produce “art” with his jewelry, Muehling’s jewelry production, like all good design, is instigated from a point of purpose. He needed only to answer this: what is the object’s function and how can it most beautifully fulfill that function? Two functions needed addressing: that which is the essence of jewelry and the specific workability of an individual jewelry type.



Muehling met the challenge of workability most often by integrating individual physical function with his decorative ovoid form. Nothing seems more ludicrous to him than the little "art composition" with pin back, hanging on a woman's chest. Instead, the method by which he secures a piece to a woman is designed as an unobtrusive, logical and natural outgrowth of the form of the piece itself. He pursued this idea in his very first work, a ginkgo-shaped hair pick, in which the stem of the leaf was coaxed by hammer to a fine point. From volume to plane to line – he has explored and rarely deviated from that first essential accomplishment. His elongated drop earrings carry the elegant stretch of bead to the thinness of an earwire. Drop and fastener exist in a single breath. He houses the pin stem for his shell brooches down the length of their interior. The linear mechanism is soldered at one pointed end. It is meant to grab a small bit of fabric, then wrap around the open convex spirals of the form. When the turns are completed, it locks securely and invisibly into the shell's other tip.

It is in the way Muehling has answered the question of the function of jewelry itself that he breaks from so many others, jewelers and "naturalists" alike. Although he looks to nature for his formal vocabulary, he considers it foolhardy to attempt to recreate or capture it. Muehling understands jewelry as a celebration of feminine (not nature's) beauty. He rejects the notion of status jewelry, but he empowers his wearer by creating jewelry that embodies the culturally idealized esthetic of the "feminine." He believes that jewelry must be subordinate to the woman; it must never precede or overwhelm. He believes in and seeks to gratify the primal imprint for self-adornment and self-enhancement. His use of stylized primal materials – shells, pods, seeds – taps that recollection. He understands the intangibles of jewelry, that it can produce magical moments, that it has the ability to arouse both the wearer and the viewer. Ted Muehling addresses the emotion of jewelry. And in so doing, he succeeds in making jewelry for a woman's ego, not his.

LEFT

Maharabee Earrings
hand-forged silver orb, gold wire and small gold beads, pearls, silver ovals dangling from bottom, 1.5" d., 1983
Photo: Don Freeman

This attention to emotion is at the heart of his success – wildly disparate women can and do wear his jewelry. But other factors contribute. The pillowed ellipse that is his formal fingerprint is perfectly suited to the task. It is itself a controlled, essential echo of the feminine. When Muehling seamlessly integrates fastening and form, he simultaneously integrates form and female. That is, Muehling's jewelry never contradicts, never presents itself in opposition or as an appendage, but appears only as a gracefully elegant extension of the woman. Women feel estheticized, elegant, elongated by the physical and psychological flattery of his forms.

That flattery can take the form of a caress. Many of his designs – the olive branch bracelets, the chip necklaces, the pod earrings – drape the body like a tender embrace. Their ergonomic grace is dependent on their formal reciprocity with the body, and the responsiveness of their particularized mobility. Simultaneously, his treatment of materials – bronze, silver, plastic, shell – renders them perfectly smooth, matte and mysterious, and sometimes transformed. (In fact, he has no desire to work in gold, in part because it is so immutable). Through their pumiced or chemically induced changes, they must be touched to be fully understood by both the wearer and the admirer. The hand is inevitably drawn to the softness of his curve and the softness of his surface. Muehling's pieces invite intimacy.

This is an accomplishment for boldly scaled, nonprecious jewelry. In part, it is achieved by the warmth and complexity of his colors and the invitation of his matte surfaces (although he believes the latter is strictly a design decision – reflective surfaces would visually decompose the integrity of his forms). It is also achieved through his interest in movement.

Muehling's pieces are not only shaped but engineered to emphasize the grace of the feminine form. Like every other element, it is understated, subtle. It comes as a sway or a lilt that parallels the form in motion. A branch pin supports several leaves; a single one dangles. It catches the eye, encouraging a closer look at the piece and at the woman who wears it. A branched necklace will wrap the neck several times; only a few pieces sway with the wearer's gait. A rice earring flickers like a darting tongue at the edge of a lobe. Its weight is perfectly arrived at; that fleck continues to titillate after her head is stilled. For the viewer, it is a tantalizing provocation.

In the contemporary clamor to make statements, be they through art or jewelry, artists are abandoning the historical intentions of their genres. Ted Muehling has an unusual appreciation for women and for beauty. He concedes it is retrograde. He wouldn't have it any other way; neither would the thousands of *au courant* women who respect, respond to and regularly collect his production jewelry.

Vanessa S. Lynn is a writer living in New York who frequently contributes to Metalsmith.

Focus

Tom Markusen

It may surprise some, judging from Tom Markusen's studio output, that the production objects are handmade, without the use of dyes, props or molds. The objects are smithed straight from the forge, from red to black heat, from the mid-section outward. Markusen has developed systems and procedures for manufacturing and marketing that rival those of any successful entrepreneur; while behind his work, there is a desire to be recognized as an American holloware maker with integrity.

by William Baran-Mickle

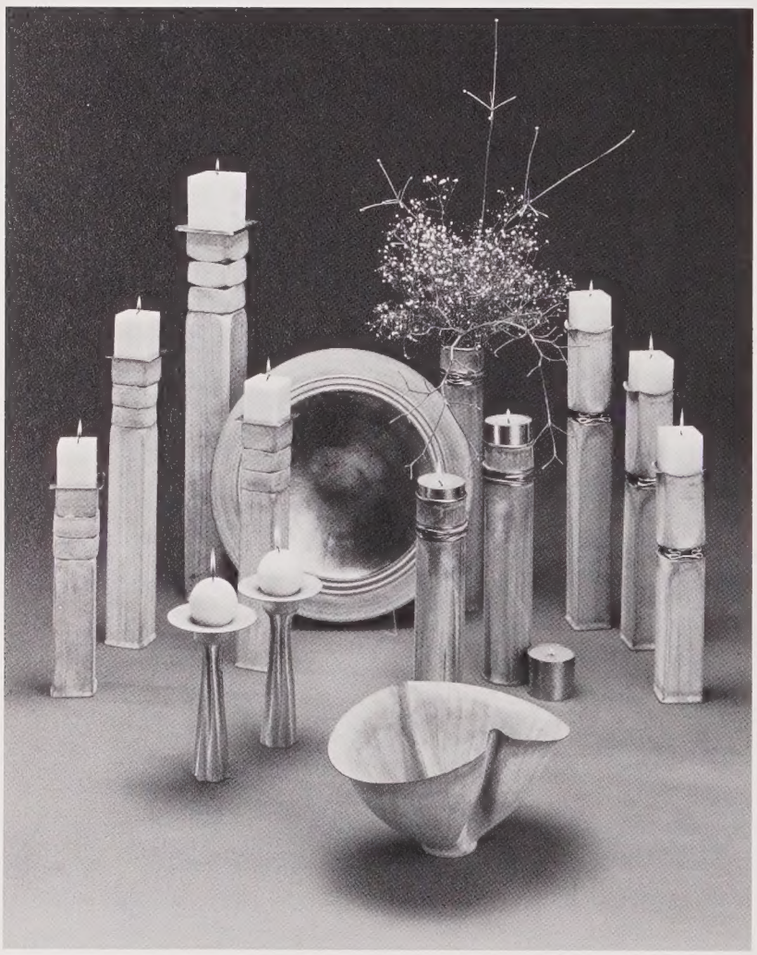


Figure 1
A *Verdigris* collection, group shot

Surely one of the main goals of any aspiring metalsmith is to be able to earn a living making work by hand. Although this is a difficult road, it is one that Tom Markusen has traveled successfully. Fifteen years ago, Markusen was producing around 10 objects per year. Despite successful exhibiting and teaching, he abruptly changed directions. Today, Markusen's studio creates between 30 and 50 objects per week. He employs four full-time smiths and maintains a grueling pace of four craft fairs per year. His regular accounts now top 100.[1] New designs are continually developed and must successfully fit into the overall "Markusen style." Some designs are produced in limited editions of 12 to 10, while others are open stock. Each piece made for sale is hand-stamped with the studio hallmark, design number and, if appropriate, the edition number.

Figure 1 shows one of Markusen's production lines. As with any of his lines, it comprises a number of styles available in several different metals (copper, brass, nickel and sterling), with various diameters and a variety of heights. This photo shows a collection with verdigris oxidized patina on copper. The production bowls, candleholders, vases and plates are also available with a wide variety of surface treatments such as heat and verdigris patinas, chrome-black, nickel and sterling plates. Most of these are offered in unlimited quantities.

Markusen's best-known line is the tubular/circular candleholders, bowls, plates and vases. The philosophy behind that production has a simple premise: a distinctly American, handmade holloware should be available to the buying public. One of the starting points was to identify seamless copper tubing as a mid-century American invention, which became available in a wide range of sizes for the plumbing trade. The ability to create pleasant forms by hand, by American labor, and be able to sell them at competitive prices both in the United States and abroad has been Markusen's challenge.

In order to meet this challenge, he developed a balanced approach to the business of craft. The technical side is the starting point, the essential core. It deals with esthetic choices of form and surface, as well as labor procedures and equipment. This fulfills the metalsmith's direct creative needs. Markusen has the desire to design and create functional/decorative items and to find suitable markets for them. In this way, he is part of the humanistic tradition that includes the GI-Bill artists and those "back-to-the-earth" youths of the 1960s.

Marketing seems to be an almost equally important aspect of being an artist today. It is concerned with price ranges, advertising, limited versus unlimited editions, annual trends in color and so forth. This is an area less dealt with in the education of the metalsmith. It is a process of trial and error that every artist must confront. However, the decade has brought a new business ethic to the craft world, and an understanding of economics and marketing can mean the realization of the craftperson's dream. In Markusen's case, stylization and aggressive control over the marketplace have been keys to his success.

Figure 4
Three Leg Bowl (#652B)* and *Four Leg Bowl (#653B)
copper bowl, cast brass base, 12 x 18"d. and 15 x 12" d., 1990
Photo: Joe A. Watson

Beginning around 1976, Markusen began analyzing and organizing his workshop into a company that works and grows. In 1989, Professor Markusen took a full-year sabbatical to develop new directions. The results were seen in a retrospective exhibition titled "A Decade of Metals. 1980-1990," held at the Tower Fine Arts Gallery of SUNY Brockport this past fall.[2] After a decade of building an identity for his holloware, Markusen took this leave from teaching to allow himself time to explore several ideas. Working around a regular cycle of production and craft fairs, he first created six sculptures and later the prototypes for two new series. The sculpture provided new insights and options that expand the classic forms for which Markusen is known.

The initial goal for Markusen's sabbatical was to create nine sculptures. Only six were actually completed. However, they provided the artist enough new information on forms, surfaces and combinations to move beyond the hammered, fluid forms of his hallmark style. These sculptures, titled *Architectonic I–VI*, (Figure 2) explore plane and level changes and new surfaces. The architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright was a main influence for these sculptures. An important factor was that they not be concerned with function or containing. In order to complete the series, he set up a sand-casting facility. The facility was later used to produce elements for sculpture and leg sections for the new bowl series.

The "floating" or "multi-leg" bowl series, (Figures 3 and 4) consists of three bowl types, or shapes, and a variety of sandcast brass legs. The basic premise was to lift the bowl up off the ground plane and relieve it of the necessity to stand alone by either having a flat bottom or an added foot. The Asian esthetic of displaying objects is evident here. Metalsmiths rarely are able to complete a holloware form without altering it for stability. Here, Markusen finally finds one elegant solution that lifts up the bowl to be admired for all its fullness and sensuousness. The copper bowls themselves were spun outside the studio by master spinner Bernie Towel, who has worked with Markusen for many years.

The legs for the bowls are the series' amusing feature. Elements from the sculptures were isolated and combined into stylized units. Markusen wanted to contrast the softness of the spun copper bowl with the bright, geometric and irregularly rough surface of the sandcast brass. Some of the floating bowls are offered with interchangeable legs, although this series is limited to an edition of 12 (per bowl type). These new features are in keeping with the wide variety of choices available within the established production lines.

The "pattern" series (Figure 5, see front inside cover) is the most unrelated to Markusen's previous work. It consists simply of very large sheets of copper or steel that have been bent and held upright by interlocking tabs. Beyond the vase and bowl, the bent and interlocking system is designed as a modular, stacking system capable of reaching 10 feet in height. Although these pieces were sparked by inquiries from architects and designers interested in larger works for open areas, Markusen had planned the project for some time. In the early 1970s Markusen purchased the tools of an entire sheet-metal shop that had closed its doors. The style and techniques used in sheet-metal work had long interested him, but he had not found the time to work in that direction. The sabbatical year provided him the opportunity to catch up to his creative ideas and place them in his repertoire. The prototypes for the two series have already been integrated into the artist's production-line offerings.

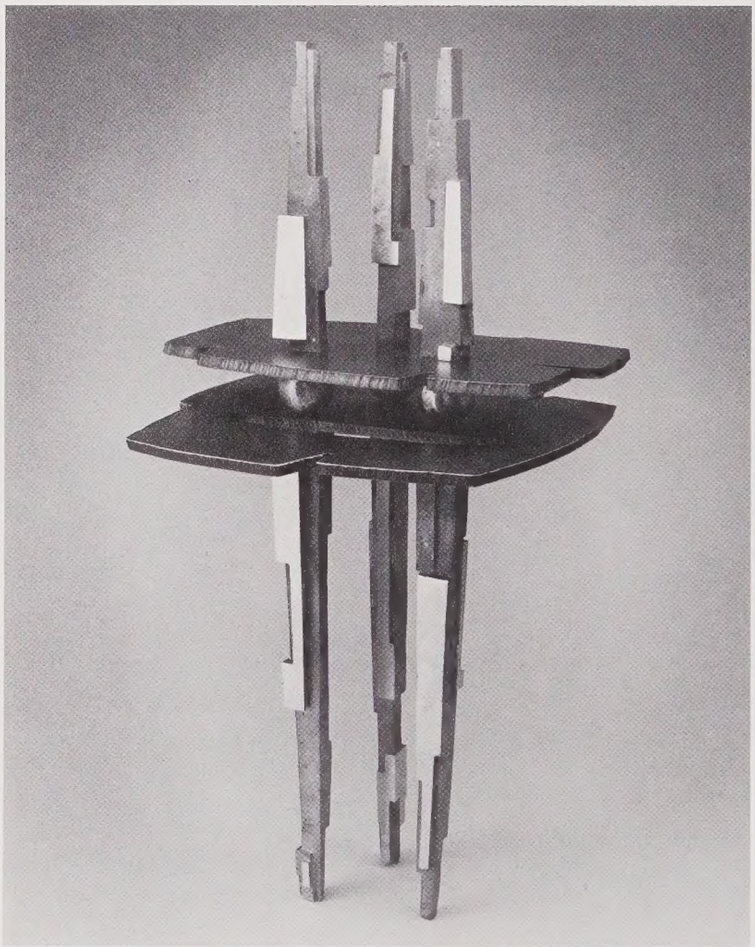


Figure 2
Architectonic IV (#8315)
cast brass, mild steel, 1990
Photo: James Dusen

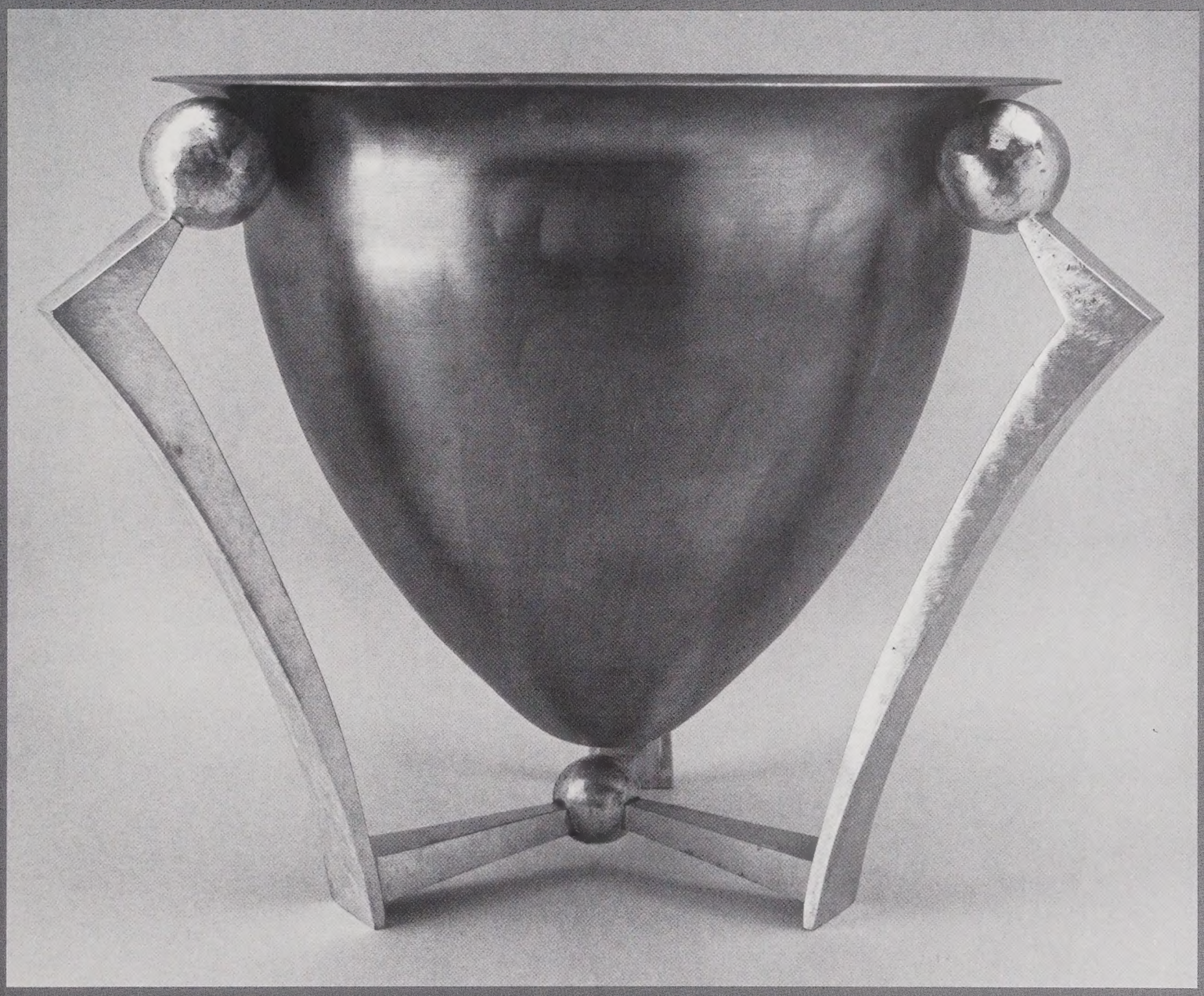
William Baran-Mickle is a metalsmith and is working on his master's in art history at Syracuse University.

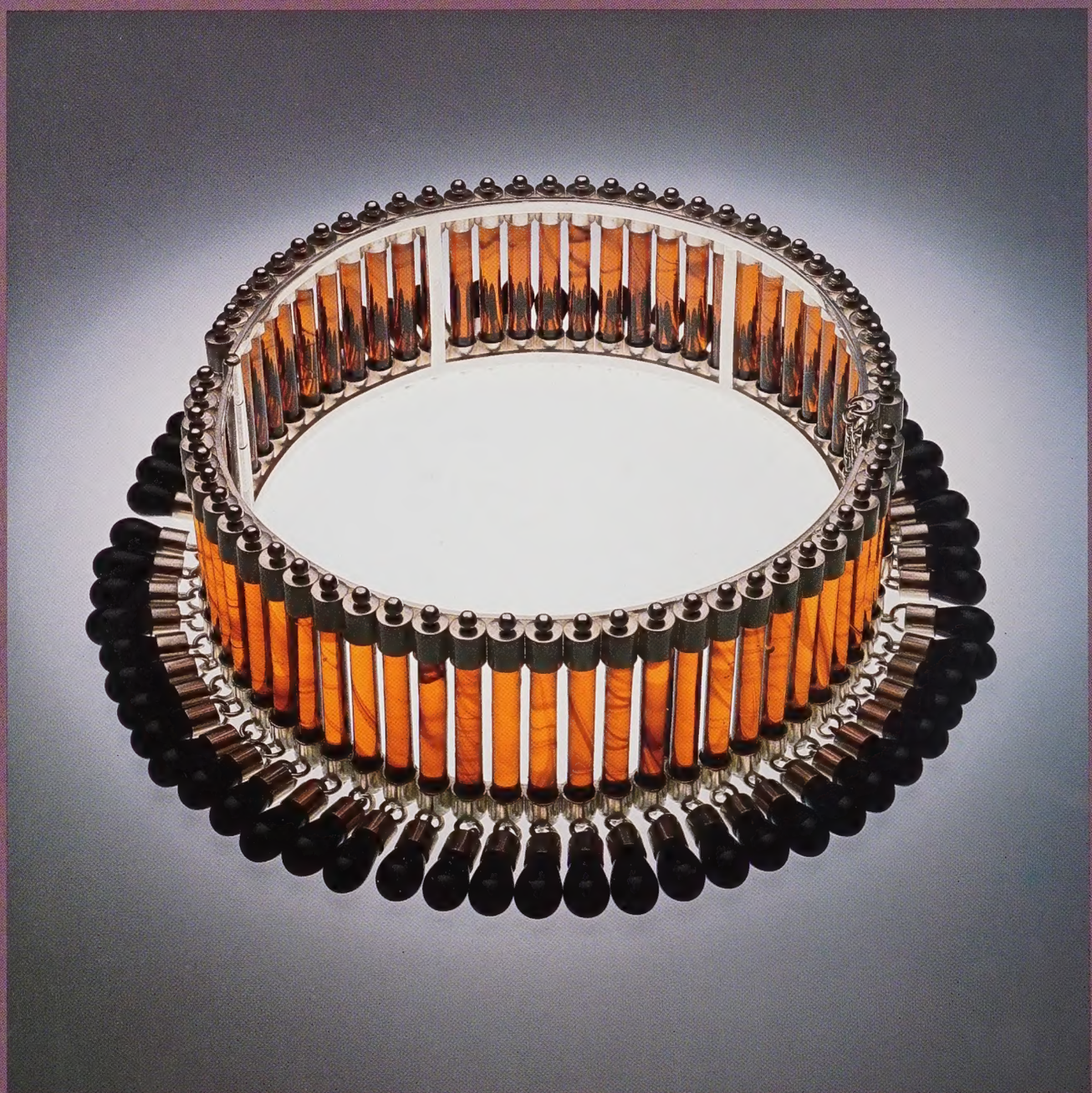
Notes

1 Markusen also continues to teach and is a professor of art and chairman of the Art Department at the State University of New York at Brockport.

2 Tower Fine Art Gallery has brought to public view a longstanding series (six so far) of metals exhibitions beginning in 1972. The last one was in 1978.

Figure 3
Floating Bowl (#558B)
copper bowl, cast brass base, 12 x 14" d., 1990





MARY ANN SCHERR

A Designer / Jeweler's Route of Investigation, Learning, Change, Discovery

by Blue Greenberg

Machines have always fascinated Mary Ann Scherr – first the drill press, bandsaw and oxyacetylene torch, and now the computer; Autocad, Deluxe Paint and PageMaker. For her, the computer represents one more opportunity to incorporate the latest technical advances into good design. It is part of that never-ending quest to make the quintessential human adornment.

Jewelry is not just fashion or fad for Mary Ann Scherr, it is a way of life. As jeweler, teacher and pioneer in methods for working with exotic metals, her contributions to the jewelry industry span 30 years. And her research and development of fashion jewelry to disguise lifesaving devices has been recognized worldwide, including body monitors, etching on metal, pioneering the use of nontraditional materials such as stainless steel, aluminum, plastic and titanium, and in 1989, the development of a new technique to accelerate and improve the etching process.

In addition to her studio work, she was associate professor and director of the Metals Program at Kent State University and taught design at the University of Akron and the Akron Art Institute. In 1968, she began teaching in the summer program at Penland School. When she moved to New York, she joined the faculty at Parsons School of Design, and, in 1980, became chair of the Department of Clay, Metal, Glass and Textiles. Now she lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, and teaches weekly studio courses in jewelry design at Duke University.

Scherr's career began in junior high with portraits on bottle corks. A local department store paid her $20 for them and with the money she bought huge quantities of butcher paper to use for drawing.

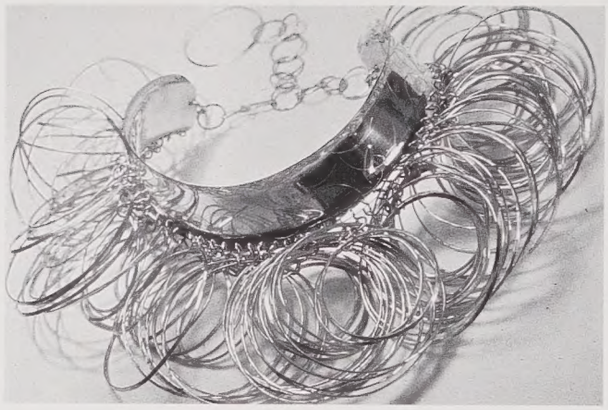
In 1950, she married Sam Scherr, a fellow student at the Cleveland Institute of Art, and they left for design jobs in Detroit, she to Ford and he to General Motors. She was one of the first female automobile designers in the industry and worked on interior and exterior designs for Ford, Mercury and Lincoln. Hood ornaments, hubcaps, door escutcheon panels, instrument panels and color selections were second nature to a woman who looks like she wouldn't know the front end of a car from its rear.

After a year-and-a-half in the automobile world, she and her husband decided to start their own industrial design company. Her first designs were children's books, which she wrote and illustrated. Her painting skills led her from coloring books to restaurant murals. As the company began to move into product design, she turned to ceramic cookie jars, which she designed and sculpted using nursery-rhyme themes. They sold for $3 each. Twenty years later they gained national attention when North American Watch Company paid $19,000 per jar at an auction of Andy Warhol's household goods.

The first baby put a hold on her active participation in the design company, but six weeks after Randy was born, she was enrolled in a jewelry design course. Feeling the metal in her hands was addictive. "I knew this was special," she said. Two nights into the course, Randy became ill and she had to drop out. Undaunted, she built a workbench at home and began to teach herself about metals. She remembers those exasperating years when she used hard solder on everything.

It wasn't long before her inventive mind began to think about improving the method for illustrating on metal. In 1950, through extensive experimentation with combinations of chemicals and information from local chemists about toxic effects, she began to etch designs on metal. It wasn't too many years before she was recognized as a leading authority on jewelry etching. Ultimate confirmation of her expertise came when Oppi Untracht asked her to be his technical advisor on etching in his definitive jewelry encyclopedia, published in 1983.

Necklace
hand-blown glass beads, sterling silver, hinge construction, parts fabricated, constructed, 8 x 3" d., 1988
Photo: Doug Van De Zande



LEFT
Loops Necklace
sterling silver, forged, hinge construction, engraved, 15 x 7" d., 1987
Photo: Tagio

RIGHT
Circle/Square Necklace **(full size and detail)**
sterling silver, 13" d., constructed, surface embellishment, 1990

In 1954, she started thinking about clothing, believing that men must be designing maternity clothes because they were never comfortable. She designed one that was flexible using an "A" line that freely expanded as the mother needed it. She sold that "one piece" maternity dress, which became a standard, to Stern Manufacturing Company. Lord and Taylor suggested that she go into the fashion business, but by then she was in love with metal.

It was during this time that she and her husband went to Korea at the invitation of the United States-Korean program, "Aid to International Development." His company researched and developed Korean products to be sold in international markets.

While there, she taught metals techniques and developed a collection of jewelry based on ancient Chinese-Korean charms. She sold her designs to Brentano's and they marketed them throughout the United States. They became the first in a series of museum replicas that today are sold all over. The prototypes were cast from steel molds made in the United States and then given to the Korean "cottage industry" to produce. During this period, the plastics division of General Rubber Company, Akron, Ohio, worked with Scherr on methods for laminating fabric and encasing it in plastic. The result was a perfect match for a couturier collection.

In 1960 she was invited to exhibit her jewelry at an Industrial Design Society of America conference at Greenbrier, West Virginia. An executive from U.S. Steel approached her with the idea of designing jewelry out of stainless steel as a novel way for the company to exploit other uses for stainless, as well as another way to lobby the U.S. Congress that stainless steel would be the perfect new metal for coinage. In the end, stainless lost to the copper sandwich, but Scherr's collection of 26 pieces toured the country, ending in a solo exhibition at New York's American Craft Museum.

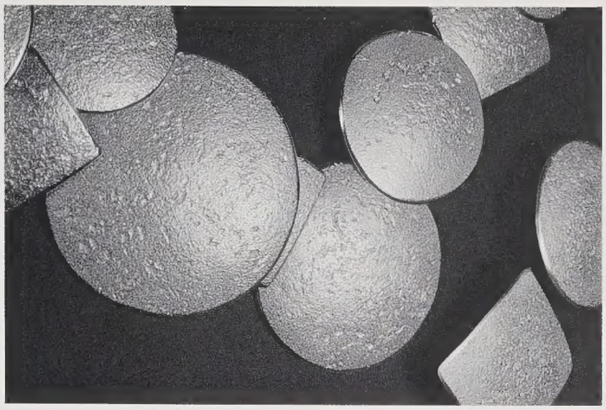
Working with stainless requires months of experimentation, especially with forcing oxides onto a surface that is created to resist contamination. Ultimately, she realized surfaces in gray, orange, black and white patinas. She developed delicate welding processes to attach pieces of stainless to each other, increasing her own knowledge of metal techniques. One of the most challenging pieces of the collection was a necklace with interlocking elements that looked like a small wall of pierced decorative parts.

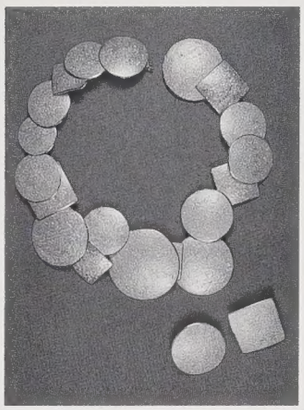
When Penland School invited her to North Carolina's Blue Ridge mountains to teach metals and jewelry design, it was a turning point in her career. In an atmosphere of interdisciplinary cooperation, teaching students who are willing to commit to intensive concentration is so heady that 22 years later she is still participating.

On the first day of one of Penland's new sessions, as she was greeting a returning student, the student's scarf fell off, revealing a trachea tube in her throat. She had undergone radical surgery and the tube had been inserted permanently. Scherr offered to make her a piece of jewelry to wear at her throat. The one-by-two-inch cover of gold and silver, with precious stones, lay over a standard-issue trach and helped her friend regain a new sense of personal worth. Ultimately, a copy was invited into the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Institution.

In the meantime, the Mayor of Akron asked her to design a costume for Ohio's Miss Universe candidate. The theme was to be space, since Ohio was the home of all the first astronauts. "They were going to walk on the moon that night," Scherr explains, "and while I watched television I was working on the costume. I had decided to simulate a heart monitor device into the belt, and as I worked I watched the heartbeat graph on one of the astronauts."

That began the most fantastic and frustrating time of her life. She started thinking about her student with the trach and others who would like to cover malformations or to disguise the holes in the human anatomy surgeons must make sometimes to save lives, as well as those who carry monitors to warn them about heart complications. If she could make jewelry to disguise these life-saving devices, she could help many people adjust. The trach neckpiece was a start, but she knew that what she wanted to do would require engineering expertise. Harry Hosterman was the first biomechanical engineer to help her and, with him, she designed and patented a bracelet that masked a pulse monitor. After that came a jeweled pendant that converted into an oxygen mask.





As each monitor concept took shape, she had to figure out what was needed and then locate the engineering talents to help her with the working components. A case in point is her relationship with Kent State Biology Department and its work in air pollution. Their pollution monitors needed as much as a 14-square-foot wall, and she wanted to reduce that to five inches. She was after a device that would alert heart patients and asthmatics to dangerous levels of smoke and air pollution. The researchers laughed at the idea, but a few months later Hosterman called and said he thought it could be done. Another pollution device in the shape of a pendant operates like a music box, and, when activated by smoke in the air, plays "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes." That design uses an electronic system, which was one of the first examples of electronically induced musical notes.

In 1970, the Liquid Crystals Institute at Kent State University was involved in primary substance research under Professor James Ferguson. For Scherr, liquid crystals were the answer to devices that could help detect carbon monoxide, ultraviolet radiation and thermal body/air conditions. Using the crystals, she designed a portable electrocardiogram necklace, which the American Medical Association documented on film. There, for the first time in medical history, the heartbeat pattern was seen in full-color, helical display.

Other inventions were the "No-Nod" device that buzzes when the head falls forward in sleep, a necklace that doubles as a neck brace, sterling-silver rings with magnifying glasses attached and flexible rings that will accommodate swollen and enlarged knuckles. When she injured her own finger in a studio accident, she created a "Thumble" that began a series of cosmetic coverups in silver or gold for people missing parts of fingers.

Scherr created metal sculptures for the Aluminum Company of America, promoting their institutional theme "Rediscover Aluminum." She designed and sculpted four mythological 12-inch figures, using a then new "shell lost-wax" casting technique and caught the attention of leading national magazines.

From 1968 until she moved to New York in 1977, Scherr's Ohio studio of seven artisans produced products, commissions and limited-production jewelry in exotic and precious metals.

It was when she and Dr. Steve Kanor, a biomedical cancer researcher, developed a sensor system to monitor a baby prone to SID, or "crib death syndrome," that she came face to face with the complications of federal drug laws. As a result, this monitor remains on the drawing board.

One day she received a call from Dr. George Malindzak, Jr., Director of Medicine at the Medical School at Northeast Ohio Universities. He had recently come from North Carolina and the Environmental Protection Agency where, among other things, he had been working on body monitors. He found out about her work and asked her to join him in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where he would deliver a paper on body monitors to the International Conference of Station and Body Monitors. Her monitors were the only working ones in the world and Malindzak wanted her along to demonstrate them. This gave Scherr exposure to the professional biomedical world, and, ultimately, the popular press. Again she was the subject of articles in periodicals like *The New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *People Magazine*, *Omni* and even the children's newspaper *The Weekly Reader*. She made appearances on the Today Show, Good Morning America, Johnny Carson and Dan Rather's nightly news. French, Canadian, English and Japanese television interviewed her via telephone and video tape.

With Malindzak, she designed a breath monitor. In this device, a sensor responds to the breath and electronically activates a light-emitting-diode display of green through yellow to red. The quantity of breath hydrocarbons causes a movement of light and determines the quality of breath odor.

Over a period of 10 years, Scherr worked sporadically on the body monitors, consulting with engineering experts and experimenting with gold, silver and stainless steel. Interest would ebb and flow cyclically. Because of her research, The Defiance College in Ohio awarded her an honorary Doctor of Humanities. By this time, she had invested over $150,000 of personal money into a dozen prototypes and realized that major money was needed to do more sophisticated engineering and to test the feasibility of manufacturing these monitors. Until outside interest in funding could be found, the inventions went on the shelf.

FAR LEFT
Saytre sculpture
from "Discover Aluminum" series
aluminum, lost-wax cast, wax construction, 4";
made for ALCOA,
Aluminum Company of America, 1974

LEFT
Necklace
14k and18k gold, sterling silver,
diamonds, cast, reticulated,
constructed, 7 x 8" drop, 1989

When Scherr moved south, she renewed her friendship with Malindzak, now working for the National Institute of Health. With his help she reestablished the medical base for the monitors, which resulted in an exhibition of the monitors at the Duke University Medical Center. Another exhibit is scheduled for Raleigh's Rex Hospital in the Spring. Today, of course, the prototypes, which still work, are outsized. In the 15 years that have passed, new technology and the use of the microchip have reduced the size of the monitors, thus requiring smaller, more delicate products. Even so, the conceptual function continues to challenge the industry.

Although the body monitors almost consumed her, they were only part of Scherr's busy life. Early in the 1970s, she was invited to be a part of the Reed and Barton "Signatures 5" show with metal artists Arline Fisch, Linda Watson-Abbott, Ronald Pearson and Glenda Arentzen. She also experimented in developing photochemical piercing and inlay, which resulted in fully etched-metal patterns of gold inlay on silver. At this time too, she became one of the first Americans, and one of the few women, to become an associate member of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths at Goldsmiths Hall in London. This came about after she presented her work, along with William Harper, Heikki Seppä and Mary Lee Hu, at Goldsmiths Hall.

While in London she was introduced to titanium, a new material whose color could be changed through electrically charged water. She invited James Ward and Edward De Large to demonstrate the process in New York for her at Parsons. After that demonstration, she bought the power equipment necessary to anodize titanium and created a collection that she exhibited at the FAE (Fashion Accessories Exposition) in New York. Interest was so great that she and her husband started American Titanium, manufacturing 200 pieces a day for distribution worldwide. In the process of fabricating the necklaces, earrings, bracelets and hair ornaments, she discovered that a dental material "No-San" could replace the dangerous hydrofluoric acid needed to develop the purity of color. Titanium jewelry was introduced at Robert Lee Morris's New York Artwear Gallery in a show that included Morris and 10 others.

Etching on metal has been an interest of Scherr's since those early days when she was trying to teach herself about materials. In 1988, she attended the Society of North American Goldsmiths Conference in San Antonio, Texas, where the Rio Grande Company of Albuquerque demonstrated a graphics color printer. Fascinated by the possibilities, Scherr printed an ink image on a piece of scrap metal, returned home and began to investigate the potential of "instant" silkscreen printing on metal. It took two years to perfect the process, which begins with an art image copied by a standard paper-copy machine. Then, using the Rio Grande printer, an "instant" silkscreen image is transferred to a metal surface. After curing, using a nontoxic water-based resist, the metal is etched. The new, revised method replaces much of the equipment and time-intensive systems used to reproduce images on metal surfaces. What had required two to five days is accomplished now in a matter of hours. From the most delicate design to bold, hard edge, multiples can be etched with perfect integrity. Scherr has already done a number of workshops on the procedure and spends hours on the phone explaining to designers around the country how the process works.

When Scherr philosophizes about her work, her words are those of a dreamer, not a commercial jewelry designer. "For me art is not just the action of the maker, it is the investigation, the learning, the change, the discovery. It is exciting to watch a surface break into life, whether from a difficult computer exercise or just pressing a switch, which starts the electricity, or simply sketching an image. I am deeply moved when a finished work of mine is worn and appreciated, but the greatest satisfaction, for me, is when I can make those small beginning thoughts become a full expression."

Note

The information in this article comes from many hours of conversation between Mary Ann Scherr and the author during October and November, 1990.

Blue Greenberg is an instructor of art history at Meredith College, Raleigh, NC and a regular art critic for the Durham Herald.

"I Wanted to do Something Different"

C. Carl Jennings
A Life in Ironwork

by F. Jack Hurley

This past fall, the National Ornamental Metal Museum in Memphis, Tennessee mounted a retrospective exhibition of the work of master metalsmith C. Carl Jennings. A graduate of the California School of Arts and Crafts in 1934, Jennings worked in a number of shops before opening his own, El Diablo Forge, in Lafayette, California. Historian F. Jack Hurley traces here Jennings's 62 years of work in wrought iron, from such commissions as signs for the Christian Brothers Winery and light fixtures for the Church of the 49ers to tool making, vessels and one-of-a-kind masks.

Carl Jennings turned 80 this year. His body is not as straight as it once was, but his eyes are clear, his hands are strong and his voice is articulate. From his forge in Sonoma, California, he continues to turn out work that is original and distinctively his own.

At a recent "Repair Days" event at the National Ornamental Metal Museum, Carl was the honored craftsman. At the same time, his work was featured in a solo exhibit at the museum. For two days in October, he gave generous chunks of time and experience to the younger journeymen who had come to help the museum raise money, while undertaking several repairs himself. He also gave a gallery talk at the opening of his show. For all who were able to be a part of the weekend, it was a time for learning and admiring.

Carl's father and grandfather were both blacksmiths. Cut from the sturdy midwestern stock that typified blue-collar workers at the turn of the century, his father worked as a smith at various coal mines in and around the area of West Frankfurt, Illinois. When Carl's mother died he moved the family west in search of better work and a change of scenery. There followed several years of wandering. His father could always find a job since he was a first-class smith, but there was never sufficient incentive to stay. Somehow, Carl finished high school while also spending more and more time with his father in whatever shop happened to be his current workplace. Carl admired his father's practical knowledge of iron and learned a great deal from him. "Hardly a day passes since being in business," he observes, "when I don't think, 'Gosh, I wish I'd asked Dad how to do this. He forgot more about straight blacksmithing than I'll ever know.'"

In 1928 the Jennings landed in San Francisco and put down roots. Carl's father got a job in the shops of Pacific Gas and Electric and, on May 20, Carl also went to work there, as an assistant to his dad. It was a good experience, but in 1931, Carl was laid off. The depression was deepening and PG&E couldn't use him anymore. A few months of job seeking convinced Carl that it was time to do what he really wanted to do, go to art school. "I had always had a yen to do creative work – I was always drawing," he recalls. The San Francisco School of Arts and Crafts was accepting applications for the summer session and Carl signed up.

Left
***Mask*, steel, repoussé, chasing, 1988**
Photo: F. Jack Hurley

Below
***Vessel #90–11*, 3/8" steel plate, raised, forged, 11 x 11 x 12", 1990**
Photo: Hugo Steccati

Wall Piece #88-8
steel, 1988
Photo: Hugo Steccati

"Going to art school was the turning point in my life – from a creative standpoint," Carl acknowledges. Although the school taught only coppersmithing and silversmithing, school director Hugo Meyer did not discourage Carl from doing blacksmithing. There was a small rivet forge out behind one of the buildings, along with a small anvil. Carl made tools for the coppersmithing shop and learned some of the basic techniques of repoussé and vessel-making that would come into play again many years later. More important were the classes in design where Carl sharpened his eye and developed his taste. He worked as janitor in order to pay his way through school. It was at school that Carl met Elizabeth Gallagan, who became his wife in 1935, a hard year to be establishing a family.

For the next 15 years, Carl worked in various shops in the San Francisco Bay area. A son was born in 1939, and Carl's responsibilities increased. In 1946, Carl made the leap and went into business for himself. He bought property in Lafayette, California and established El Diablo Forge. This continued to be his place of business until his semi-retirement to Sonoma in 1971. Carl specialized in lighting fixtures, fire screens and fire tools. He found it difficult and inefficient to work with assistants and so most of his output was relatively light. He did occasional larger gates and railings on demand, hiring help when necessary.

The work turned out from El Diablo Forge and the Sonoma workshop might well be called California Gothic. There is a strong Spanish influence, along with a massive, almost brutal quality. Antonio Gaudi is cited as the major influence in Jennings' artistic life. Carl knows Gaudi's life and work well and has made two trips to Barcelona to see the famous unfinished *Sagrada Familia* cathedral and other Gaudi works. Carl is struck by Gaudi's knowledge of iron (the Spanish architect served a two-year apprenticeship as a blacksmith and actually made some of the ironwork on his earliest buildings) and his ability to integrate a number of different materials into a coherent whole. "He was a hundred years ahead of his time. His ironwork was just so far advanced. He really influenced me."

Carl has worked hard through a long and productive life. He did everything from fine art to lawnmower repairs in order to keep the bills paid, while his son grew up to become an engineer. In 1971, the property at El Diablo Forge was sold and the Jennings went into semiretirement in Sonoma. Carl did an occasional large commission, but mostly made small pieces for sale through a gallery in San Francisco. Now there was time to experiment, and Carl returned to some of the ideas and methods that had attracted him back in art school. A series of masks and heads has been an ongoing interest. Using raising and repoussé techniques on hot steel, he has produced a number of primitive, yet very lively pieces.

***Vessel*, steel, raised, sunk, forged, 1990**
Collection: National Ornamental Metal Museum
Photo: F. Jack Hurley

As sometimes happens, the freedom to "play" that semiretirement allowed brought a level of recognition that Carl could never have attained in his day-to-day business. There were solo shows at the Richmond Art Center and the Annenberg Gallery, and his work was featured at the DeYoung Museum, The San Francisco Museum of Art and the Oakland Art Museum. Awards came his way. At heart, however, Carl has remained the quintessential smith, as willing to talk about tools and techniques as he is about esthetics.

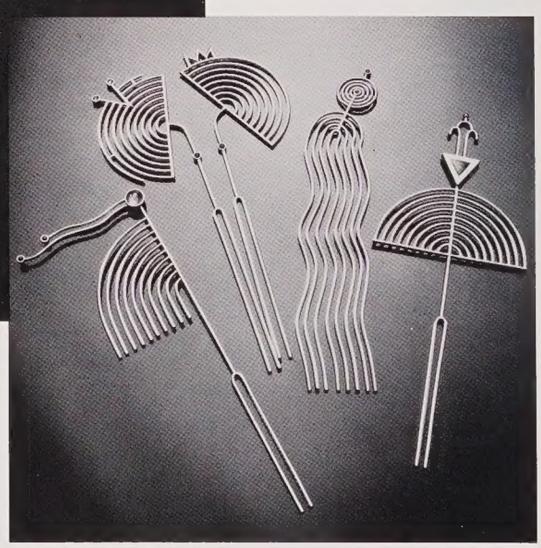
A case in point is the matter of Carl's vessels. For the last several years, Carl Jennings has become more and more identified with a series of raised vessels, often in heavy steel. The works have a massive quality that combines with a certain plasticity in a way that is both ambiguous and pleasing. Carl makes each vessel individually, using a powerful hydraulic press, a tool not usually found in the shop of artist-blacksmiths. I found myself wondering if the tool had suggested the objects or if the idea for heavy vessels had existed first and prompted a search for the tool. I asked him about this and his answer evolved into a treatise on the mind of a working artist: "Well, I wanted to get away from the linear aspects of the type of work that 99% of the blacksmiths in this country are doing out of bar stock. There's nothing wrong with it, but I wanted to do something different. I had been introduced to vessels years ago in the copper shop and I had always wanted to go back to that sort of thing."

Carl clearly wanted to work out certain ideas in metal. He also knew instinctively that he wanted to work in a heavy material. "I always did like some mass," he says. "It seems to give a quality I like, and I like the challenge." The problem, then, was finding a way of realizing the idea in his mind. His 25-pound power hammer was inadequate for the job. Working half-inch steel by hand was even more out of the question. The hydraulic press, capable of generating nearly 75,000 pounds of pressure on a single stroke was the answer, especially when combined with special-purpose tools that Carl constructed. "I like to think I'm a pretty good toolmaker," he says. "I see the need for a tool and stop everything to make it. I couldn't do that when I was in business full-time but now that I'm semiretired, it is one of the nice things. I can make whatever tool I need."

What we have here is an important clue to the difference between an artist and a craftsman. A craftsman's esthetic might well be driven by the tools available. A new tool might suggest new possibilities. For the artist, however, the idea is there first and the real question is how to realize it. This is the way Carl Jenning's mind works. And now, late in his life, more and more people are starting to recognize that although he has lived a simple, relatively hard life, he has lived the life of an artist.

F. Jack Hurley is a professor of history at Memphis State University.

FOCUS



Ringset for "The Dream" (detail)
set of 40 rings, 18k yellow gold, gemset with garnet,
sapphire, moonstone, tourmaline,
labradorite and amethyst on a perspex stand, about 7" l.

Wendy Ramshaw's

"Picasso's Ladies"

by Gail M. Brown

Those of us who have been following Wendy Ramshaw's work, for close to 20 years, have come to anticipate the fluid evolution of her personal language. She takes on challenges with great deliberation and resolve; even chance effects are handled with a sureness that results from her mature and in-depth exploration of the jeweler's process.

So too with "Picasso's Ladies," which effortlessly appropriates 15 of Picasso's female portraits as subjects for commissioned jewelry. Her refined, sculptural body ornaments seem a fitting tribute to the women who made Picasso happy, the "ideal" wearers whom he celebrated in these paintings. Ramshaw chose the sensually poised, often ornamented sitters, responding to their emotional power, their individuality in mood and temperament as well as their physical rendering. She abstracts the emotions and motifs of each painting and assimilates them into jewelry designs of more openness, richness and added sinuousness. Nevertheless, she retains her signature features – precise construction, a subtle balance of quasi-geometric forms and a contained mechanistic feel.

Ramshaw has long been interested in working from a series of portraits. She was inspired by the paintings of the well-loved, calm, already bedecked subjects: traditionally the sitter for a commissioned portrait as well as the expected client for a jewelry commission. Historically, "precious" jewelry has glorified the wearer and created a showcase opportunity for the generous donor to his lady. Ramshaw reminds us of these ongoing issues, at a time when doubtless many of *her* female clients commission their own jewelry. She responded to the vitality and spirit of Picasso's women, as that energy speaks to late 20th-century expression, as well. She has expanded her vocabulary with fresh combinations of personal imagery, materials and techniques. She further expands on the perception of jewelry as freestanding sculpture of a particular scale. She continues to involve the wearer in a direct, creative relationship with the work.

Picasso's interest in the fractured profile inspired *Earrings for "Woman With a Large Profile."* Ramshaw looked at the way Picasso distorted, rebalanced and juxtaposed frontal and side views. The large, dark space in the portrait suggested linear earrings that echo the drawing's complex interrelationship of forms. She created overscale, semicircular ear ornaments in silver, with accent forms in gold. The asymmetrical suspension design with a strong horizontal thrust has a powerful simplicity. The earrings partly cover the side of the neck and decorate the cheek of the wearer. The linear, open nature of the design makes them delicate, defying the boldness of their scale. This expansion of traditional earring scale suggests primitive adornment, a source of inspiration and energy for both Ramshaw and Picasso.

Left, inset
Haircombs for "Portrait of a Young Woman, Version XIII"
5 haircombs, silver, lapis, garnet, amethyst, 2.5 to 3 x 7.5", 1990

In *Neckpiece for "Woman in a Rocking Chair,"* Ramshaw responds to the lyrical rhythm in the composition by her inventive flowing line and specific volume. The piece circles the neck twice, ending in a pair of loops, one of which echos the "encasing" of the figure in the rocker. The spirit of the form suggests the motion of rocking. The idea is enhanced by the springiness of the metal that projects the movement of a rocker. The piece is aggressively large-scale, encumbering the wearer. The asymmetry of the design adds to the geometric cone, bead and disc shapes of black and yellow Colorcore tipped with nickel alloy that emphasize the flamboyant form of the dramatic neck ring.

She responded to Picasso's goddesslike profile with *Haircombs for "Portrait of a Young Woman, Version XIII."* These are meant to be worn high on the crown and to be seen from all sides. In design, the five silver combs manipulate a series of simple, abstract shapes in varying patterns. There is a power in the repetition of line and volume and a delicacy in the thinness of the overall forms. The linear forms refer to the portrait's hanging hair, as do the gemstones that complement Picasso's palette. The sensuality of the portrait is emphasized, focusing on the long hair and the long neck being "crowned." The placement of the flat forms on the wearer's head suggests myriad spatial relationships in real and implied space. The gesture of the forms and their open-ended pattern suggest vitality and spontaneity.

Earrings for "Woman with Large Profile"
silver, 18k gold, 1989

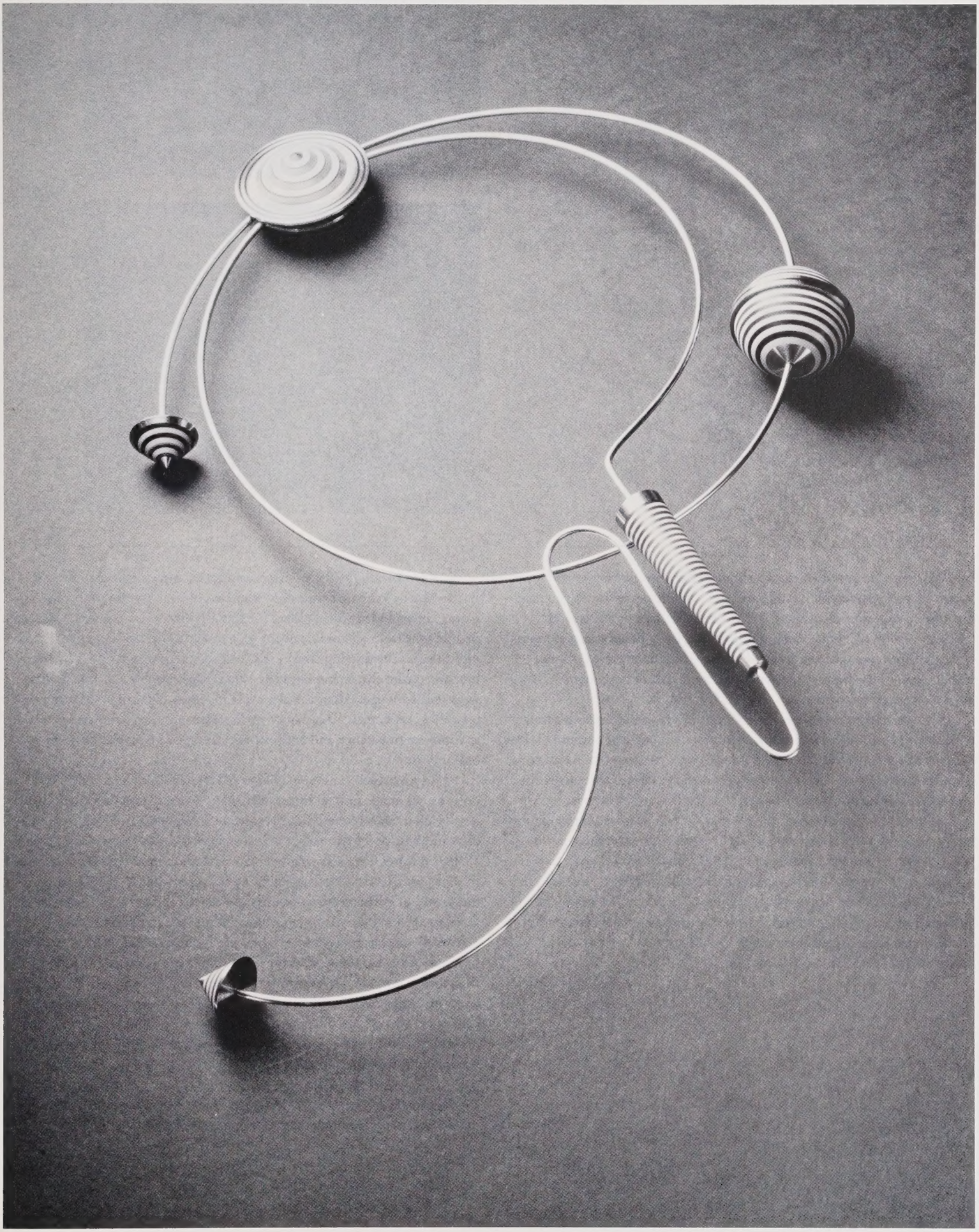
Ramshaw's *40 Rings for "The Dream"* was inspired by the mood and rhythm of the sitter. The piece is romantic, with tiny, brilliant precious and semi-precious stones of red, pink, purples and whites, accented by gold moon and star shapes that look like little rings projecting out from the fingers. The flowing hair, long neck and entwined fingers of the model suggest sensuality. A sculptural perspex stand with colored lines echoing the rings completes this elegant freestanding form. Ramshaw has expanded her familiar ring set, intended for the wearer to select any number for any number of fingers in varying combinations at each wearing. Picasso's focus on parts of the whole invited the viewer to see the body better. Ramshaw continues to involve the wearer in esthetic decisions at a direct participatory level, an aspect of body adornment both new and very old. She creates a continually variable, flexible body ornament. In so doing, she extends the language of the jewelry by presenting it in the round.

Wendy Ramshaw combines the vitality of primitive body ornament with 20th-century form and technology. Within a chosen vocabulary, an invented language, she celebrates an interest in relationships – the parts to the whole and the issue of choices. Her continuing exploration of the link between the wearer and the piece is reflected in the ongoing evolution of her work. She found in Picasso a mutual celebrant of female beauty and form. She responded to his exuberant vitality by translating his emotional designs into an ever-richer language of jewelry.

An exhibition of Wendy Ramshaw's "Picasso's Ladies" was mounted at Joanne Rapp Gallery: The Hand and the Spirit in Scottsdale, AZ in February, 1991. A catalog is available for $15, including postage and handling from the gallery at 4222 N. Marshall Way, Scottsdale, AZ 85251.

Gail M. Brown lives in Philadelphia and writes on jewelry and fine crafts.

Neckpiece for "Woman in a Rocking Chair"
black and yellow Colorcore, nickel alloy, 15 x 17", 1989



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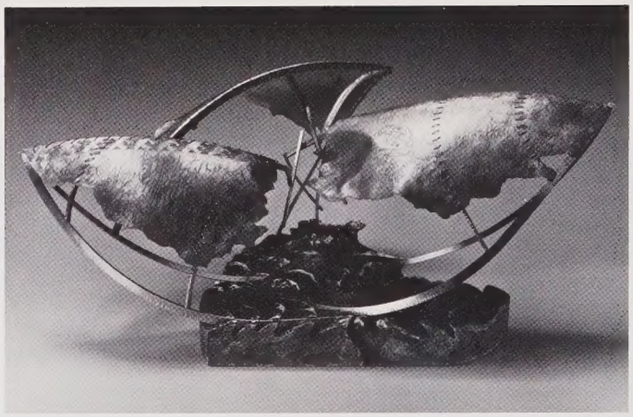


Continental Drift, brass, wood, paint, carved and painted, forged formed, engraved, patinated, 12 x 25.75 x 13.5"

River Cadence, brass, bronze, nickel silver, sterling silver, marble base, formed, fabricated, 15 x 12 x 18"

William Baran-Mickle

Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, NY
September – October, 1990

by Ron Netsky

All of William Baran-Mickle's pieces comment in some way on the forces of nature. In these works, he displays not only a concern for the environment but also a consideration of human beings' place in the greater scheme of things. The pieces on display range from literal interpretations of natural forms to more conceptual works. Even the most representational pieces go far beyond mere mimesis and, refreshingly, Baran-Mickle's conceptual works are not at all inaccessible.

River: Cadence employs a striking combination of brass, bronze, nickel silver and sterling silver in an evocative sculpture of a waterfall. It is not complexity of form that makes this piece so arresting, since the work is surprisingly austere. The form itself manages to effectively convey the undulations of earth, rock and water. Not the least of its interesting aspects is the manner in which the piece turns from flowing horizontal to more turbulent vertical in a manner that suggests a bent human torso. When we see the reflective surface of these waterfalls and the textures of the rock cores, we must, at least subconsciously, consider the earth's pockets of metals and the minerals suspended in water. We know the works are scaled representations, but the fact that they are composed of metals rather than wood, or even clay, makes for a more immediate relationship of material to content.

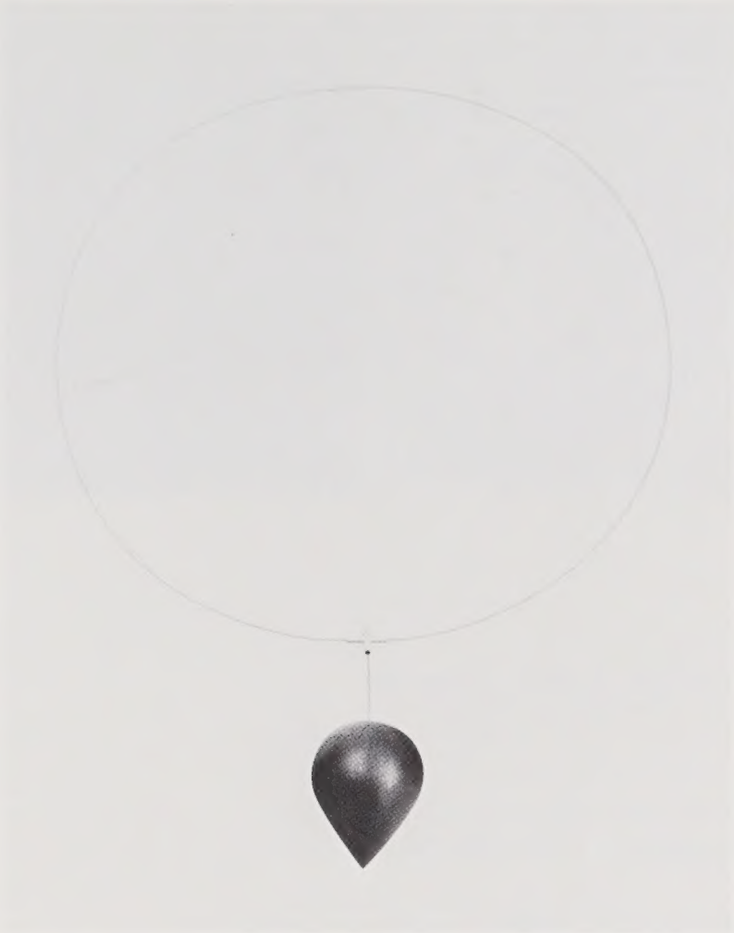
Continental Drift is perhaps the most complex manifestation of Baran-Mickle's theme combining associations of navigational instruments: an exploded world globe, the hull, masts and sails of a vessel and petroglyphs from all corners of the globe. While the sail shapes seem to be indicative of the drifting continents, the petroglyphs signify a unity of human culture that metaphorically brings together the land masses that separated eons ago. All of the above elements are balanced over a purposefully crude, painted ocean of waves. The result conjures up visions of a world out of balance and adrift despite, or because of, the progress of humans.

In his artist's statement, Baran-Mickle says his recent focus has been a dual image unified by an overriding form. *Canyon Song* contains a tension that takes Baran-Mickle's concept a step farther. Here, there is a clear implication of two halves of a structure that was once whole. The V-shaped outer form seemingly remains standing only because of a series of rods that span its length, preventing it from toppling. The smooth, fluid exterior is effectively contrasted by the combination of the three oxidized metals that form a rough, disturbed surface in the center. In *Overlook*, the chasm is between two nude bodies, a male and female, both headless. What can be seen as the overriding form here is a bricklike – therefore manmade – structure partially surrounding the figures, which contours to the bodies as perfectly as the organic materials that seem to be oozing between them. The piece can be interpreted as an exploration of constructions of civilization encroaching upon and limiting the more natural aspects of human relationships.

Ron Netsky chairs the Art Department at Nazareth College and is art critic for the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.

Above
Brooch, silver, stone with mica inclusions
.25 x 1.5 x 1", 1990

Right
Pendant, graphite, silver, stainless steel
1.75 x 2 x .75", 1989



Joan Parcher

Rezac Gallery, Chicago, IL
September 7 – October 6, 1990

by Myra Mimlitsch Gray

Joan Parcher's work is modest in scale, materials and technique, yet intellectually rich, humorous and beautiful. The pieces raise questions about the function of jewelry and the value of materials and processes. Her construction techniques are not pretentious but direct and practical methods for conveying ideas – the real strength of the work.

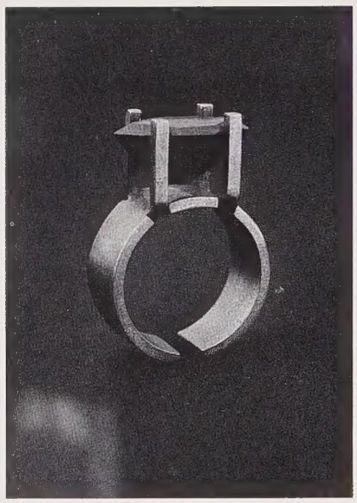
The show exhibits various levels of commitment to the content and to the esthetics of jewelry. There is a chain fabricated from thin mica disks that celebrates the pure beauty of the material and simultaneously plays off the irony of creating a chain of weak links. In another group of mica pieces, Parcher imbeds chips into simply constructed marquis-shaped bezels. When the form is oriented on the body horizontally as a brooch, it is transformed into an eye, peering out at the viewer. In another instance, Parcher hangs the same form vertically from cable as a pendant; in losing the eye reference, the piece becomes more formal and less interesting.

Parcher uses exaggerated shifts in scale to make a humorous pair of earrings that comments on commercial jewelry forms. She enlarges the commercial screwback finding so that the form, usually a subordinate aspect of the design, becomes the entire earring. The result is a playful parody of industrial esthetics as well as an homage to the handmade. While this is an amusing idea, it seems limited to a jeweler's inside cliché.

Other works in the exhibit were more conceptually sound. Hanging on the wall were two neckpieces with pendants that are large, dark, sensuous forms, wishing to be held and felt. Black streaks on the wall revealed that the forms were carved from solid graphite. This realization evokes both delight and horror. The pieces beg to be worn, yet defy the probability by virtue of the implied consequence – the ultimate smudging of one's clothes and the inevitable disintegration of the piece. These pieces toy with our desire to adorn ourselves while scorning our preference for preciousness and challenging the permanence of jewelry.

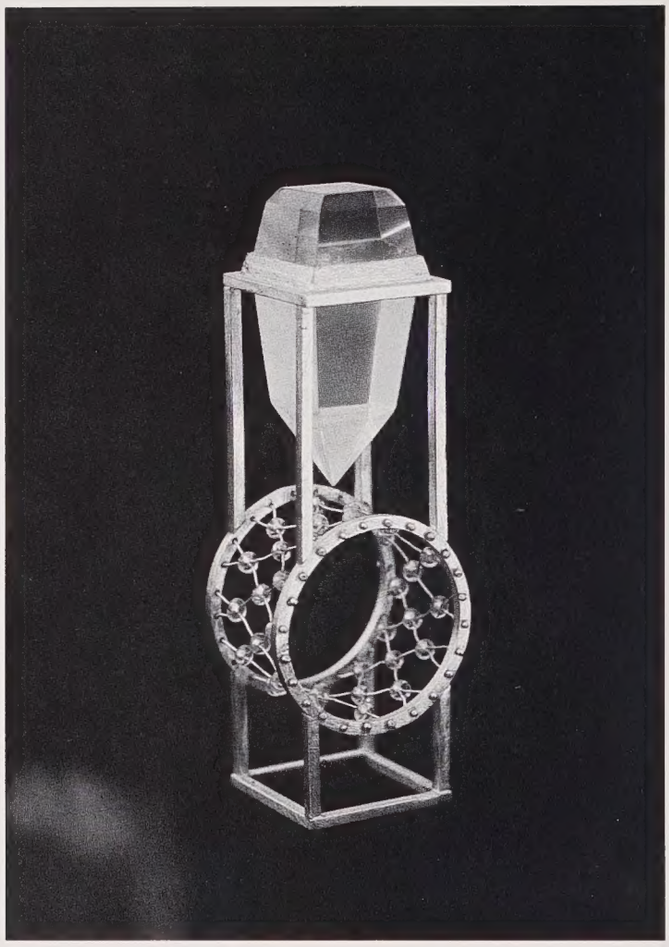
The work that offers the most poignant critique is a group of eight gold rings, arranged in a circle, that reads: "We Touch It But Do Not Find It." It's not just another diamond-studded bauble.

Myra Mimlitsch Gray is assistant professor of Metals and Jewelry at Purdue University in West Lafayette, IN.



Right
Ring, magnet, tantalum

Far right
First Byzantine Ring, 1990



Philip Sajet: Jewelry

Jewelerswerk Gallery,
Washington, D.C.
September 27 – October 18, 1990

by Lenore D. Miller

The overall statement made by this show of 27 pieces was uniquely ominous, highlighting Sajet's hallmark – mystery. The experience of Sajet's pieces may be akin to the discovery of buried ceremonial treasures, like a golden horde. Such artifacts remain somewhat mysterious out of the larger context of their civilizations, yet can be admired intently for their iconic appeal.

A Dutch jeweler, born in 1953, Philip Sajet is the grandson of a Parisian jeweler who worked in the style of Van Cleef & Arpels. The influence of this heritage can be observed in an ongoing sensibility for meticulous craftsmanship and difficulty of execution that are evident in his best work. These vestiges of old-world influences have been assimilated into his experience as a craftsman and seem to have remained consciously embedded in his designs.

In his work that relies on solid geometry there is a certain purity of form, yet his preference for crystalline shapes, pyramids and hierarchical arrangements brings to mind the Byzantine period of decorative arts, characterized by its luxurious use of precious metals and encrustation of gems on gold. Light remained the primary vehicle for religious expression, and the use of the crystal in Sajet's pieces may perhaps stand for pure light, like the light of candles reflecting off precious metals and glass mosaics in Byzantine churches.

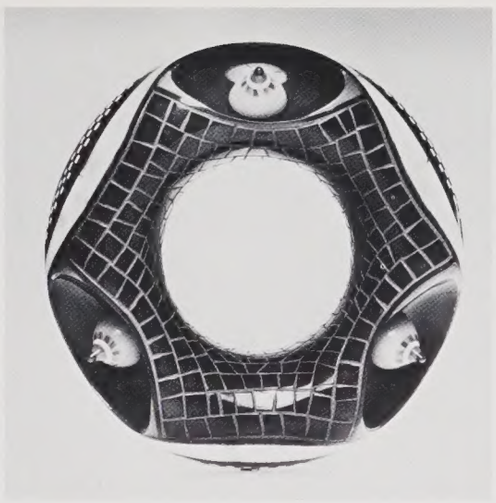
Mythology and personal iconography can be found in a piece such as the *Ring of Democles*, which has a point directed toward the wearer's finger. The *Water Bracelet* is another example where the design of the piece, an undulating blue enamel linked form, brings to mind both strength and fluidity. The fluid aspect of Sajet's work is also expressed in the use of gold mesh links to create a collapsible ring.

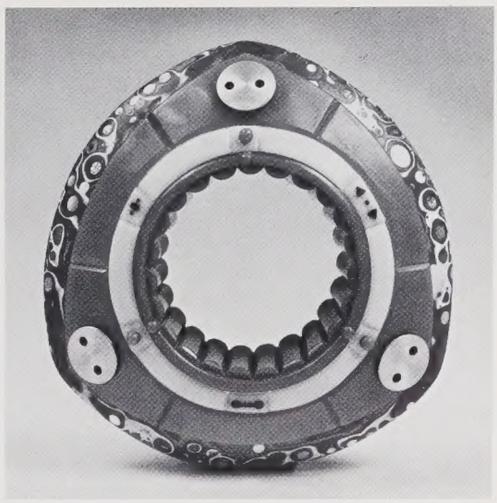
The conceptual, almost narrative, side of Sajet's work was also expressed in the exhibition. Hanging on the wall during the exhibition was photographic documentation of an imaginary necklace, an arrangement of gemstones set out in a particular circular order and photographed. A similar circular arrangement created with common beach pebbles evoked a play on the idea of monumental sculpture, bringing to mind, with the absence of a frame of reference at this scale, other monumental ceremonial circles, such as Stonehenge in England and even the ceremonial mounds of Native Americans. Also, the use of natural stones suggests geology and the forces of change in the universe. Gemstones, likewise, reflect on the jeweler's domain and seem to echo the refrain between the beauty that the artist creates and the inexhaustible ability of nature to inspire art.

The artist promotes dualities in his ring forms. For example, some pieces were meant to be worn paired on the same hand. In one such pair, made respectively of silver and gold, one is pyramidal in structure, the other a trident shape in profile. One is tubular, the other square in section. Two other rings were particularly strong in design, complex and innovative in concept. The first is a gold ring band incorporating a gold mesh and seed pearl drum, which supports an unusual crystal. This ring is quite sculptural and spatially complex when compared to the mounted magnet ring. The matte finish and mechanical quality of that ring give it an other-worldly feeling, almost as if it were a relic or ritual object of an alien civilization, a civilization much more advanced or much more ancient than ours, and maybe not of this earth. This quality is achieved through deceptively simple means.

Part of Sajet's esthetic response to contemporary ornament is the juxtaposition of elegant and rough textures, angular and smooth surfaces. The ring that combines a magnet with tantalum, although not a new idea, seems fresh and timely in the context of this exhibition. It brings to mind the idea of the earth's magnetic poles and the larger issues of chance and design in the cosmos. Sajet's designs present a severe yet always elegant presence. As sculpture, they dance between an involvement with both minimalism and conceptual art. It is this tension between two poles of being, the decorative idea and its manifest form, that makes the pieces hard to describe but equally hard to forget.

Lenore Miller is an artist, lecturer and curator of art at The Dimock Gallery, Washington, D.C.





Left to right

Bracelet, acrylic, PVC, gold leaf, heat-formed, carved, inlaid lacquerwork, 6.5" d.
Photo: Joan Broderick

Bracelet, acrylic, carved, inlaid lacquerwork, 6"d.,1988. Photo: Joan Broderick

Bracelet, acrylic, polyester, silver, carved, inlaid lacquerwork, 6" d., 1989

Peter Chang

Helen Drutt Gallery, New York City
September 11 – October 6, 1990

by Vanessa S. Lynn

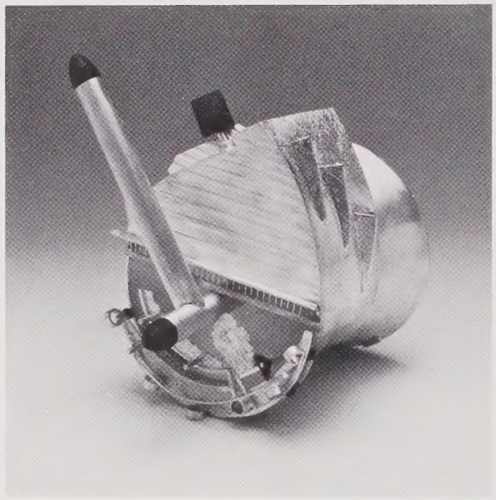
Peter Chang walks the tightrope of good taste. In his first solo show in New York, this London-born and educated artist, currently living in Scotland, presented 30 pieces – brooches, earrings and arm rings. They are constructed primarily of opaque, colored plastics, which are sometimes heat-formed, carved and/or lacquered, and often cut and inlaid. His bulbous, slug/bug brooches and outrageous, oversized arm rings have an exuberance that make them initially seem flighty, street-smart and ephemeral. They suggest "fashion fun" more than "serious jewelry." But a closer examination reveals their painstakingly meticulous fabrication. They bully and intimidate the viewer to reconsider their excessive esthetic.

It is in the arm rings that these ideas are best advanced. Over a lightweight, curvaceous, lathe-turned armature (up to 7" in diameter), Chang constructs a tightly planned crazy quilt of rippling opaque colors and twisting patterns and textures. Small, red-and-white polyester, checkerboard tesserae abut a larger, black-on-black inlay with alternating "tiles" bearing raised, red-and-green crescents. International yellow, bevel-edged, diamond shapes are inlaid with small, red domes marking every tile juncture. Smaller, flat, diamond patterns in reds and blues are laid to permit exposure of the blue-tinted adhesive beneath. Chang makes PVC simulate snakeskin! The most recent work adds physical dimension to the already boisterous amalgam. Concave, ovoid windows are carved into the ring surface, with multicolored "jewels" set on center; polyester domes and cones erupt at regular intervals. The visual ambiguity created by dense pattern and color that fails to follow form is rendered even more baroque.

Many of the flat, geometric inlays suggest the Art Deco masterpieces of Raymond Templier or Jean Dunand. Amazingly, the dynamism of the Art Deco work pales beside Chang's orchestration. The rich diversity that marked the best of early Bakelite jewelry is also recalled. While Chang resembles neither, he references both. Quintessential jewel turned into quality kitsch – high culture meets low. These pieces have the irreverent exuberance and playfulness of a Niki de Saint-Phalle; Chang's jewelry does for the body what she does for the landscape. The artist's vision is an intrusion on the site, a biomorphic, color-crazed assault that opposes its host and demands both attention and acknowledgment. It's no accident that his work has accessorized the fashion collections of Rifat Ozbek. He seems the "bad boy," the psychedelic Christian LaCroix of European jewelry. His topsy-turvy allusions are equally unlikely and equally far flung – Ravenna mosaics and pin-ball machines, Hagia Sophia and crackerjack rings, Gaudi and customized California cars, bowling balls and sci-fi aliens, drawn with a cartoonist's nib.

Peter Chang teeters between fashion and art. The bold use of color and pattern are the decorative concerns of the former. His excessive scale, technical brilliance and message signal something more. That message is the unpopular one of humor. Chang is serious about "serious fun" – jewelry that makes the participant smile, even laugh. He may be unique in rejecting narrative to achieve this aim. No cartoon characters or "kitchen cuties" here. Instead, he imbues his manipulations of color, surface and mass with a riot of cultural associations. His choices succeed in returning "joy" to jewelry.

Vanessa S. Lynn is a writer living in New York.



Silver: New Forms and Expressions II

Fortunoff, New York City
October 1 – 21, 1990

by Janet Koplos

Above, left to right

Randy Long, *Tuscany Teapot*, 8 x 7 x 3.75"

Vernon G. Theiss, *World Tea Time...*, 7.5 x 9.75 x 7"

Robert Joseph Farrell, *Just Dessert*, 13.25 x 2 x 1.25" and 12 x 3 x 1.25"

The "celebratory nature of silver" is a felicitous phrase for this second Fortunoff "New Forms and Expressions" silver competition. Offered as a theme by jurors David McFadden, Ronald Pearson and Helen Shirk, the concept of celebration encompasses both the luxuriousness of the silver material and the fancifulness of the forms invented by contemporary metalsmiths.

Without such a label, one can only speak vaguely of the range of the group show, lament the absence of label distinctions between competitive and invited works and acknowledge the continuing sharp divisions between the modernist objects that put service first and the contemporary objects that put originality and expressiveness first. Having invited works is a copout, because the exhibition is billed as a competition and because invited works may be older pieces that blur the sense of "what's happening now." It's more interesting to concentrate on the competitive pieces, noticing the absence of high polish. Ninety-five percent of them would fall in one or another of three formal themes: totemic, architectonic or animalistic. By means of the catalog, because it separates juried and invited entries, I discovered that the juried works by themselves would have been a fine, balanced, interesting show – only rather small, at 16 items.

This year's first place winner, the *Tuscany* teapot by Randy J. Long, was shown in Fortunoff's Fifth Avenue windows, but other prize-winners – Boris Bally's ambiguous emblem-object called *Kalimba*, Kevin Costello's bowl, nonfunctional aperch its copper scaffolding, called *Cradle and Foundation: self-sustainment* and Vernon Theiss's industrial engine masquerading as a teapot – were shown at the back of the first floor and were easily missed. The bulk of the show was on the top floor.

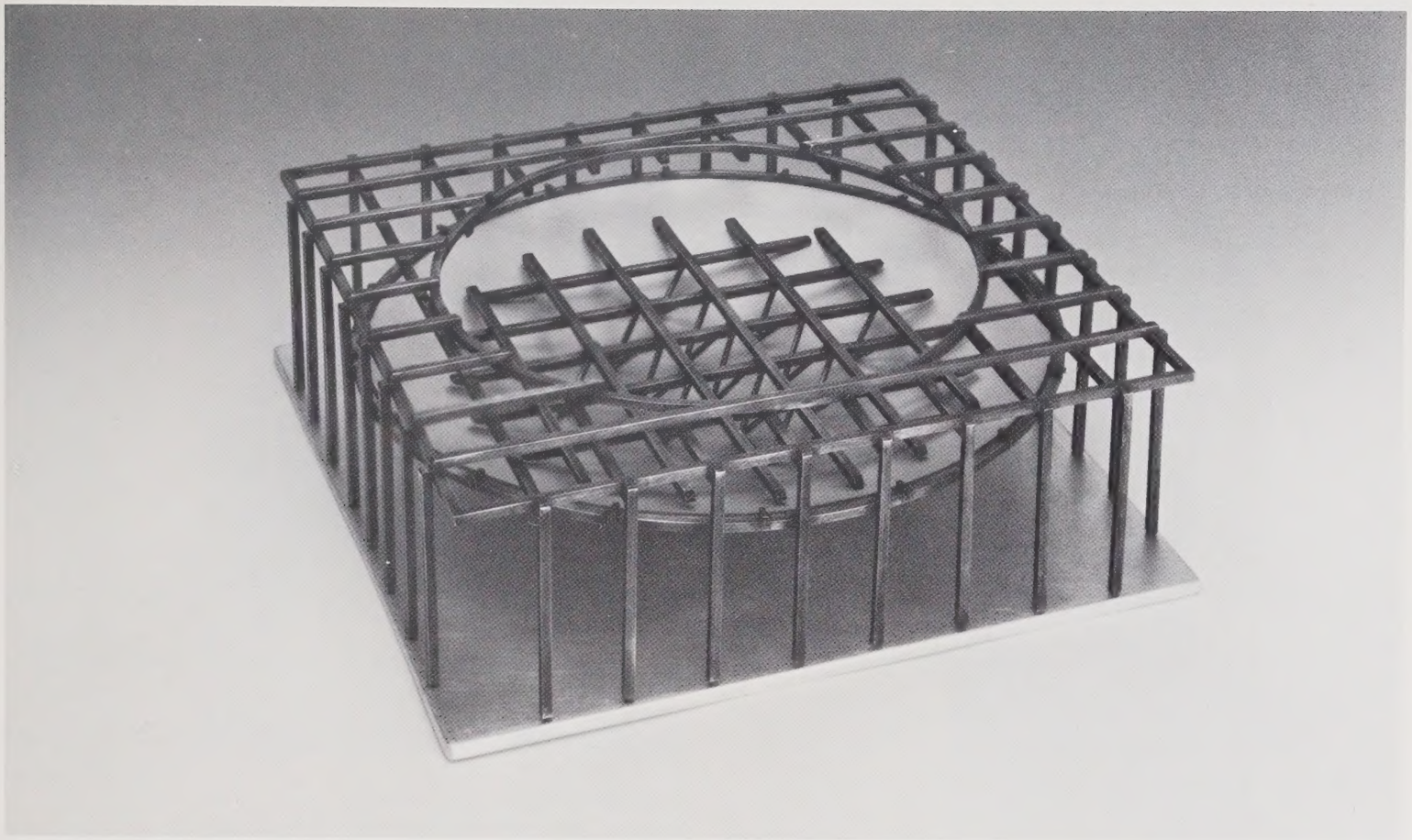
This "juried show" comes with solidly functional items that also are interesting to study: Sue Amendolara's Egyptian-inspired scent bottle, oversize napkin rings by Karin Bockenhauer in fragmented spirals that are more constructivist than organic, the origami/erector set candleholders by Margaret Boor, Robert Farrell's confetti-dashed dessert servers (perhaps they look a little more like gardening tools), Robly Glover's dachshundish tea server and Yosuke Inoue's penguinish pitcher.

So-im Kim's *Vessel XI*, like Randy Long's first-prize teapot, is more an interesting accumulation of parts than a unitary whole. Kim's pot is as sharply faceted as a slate quarry, while Long's assemblage of marble pillar, sun disk and silver cypress tree – ostensibly the handle and lid knob – makes a surreal landscape.

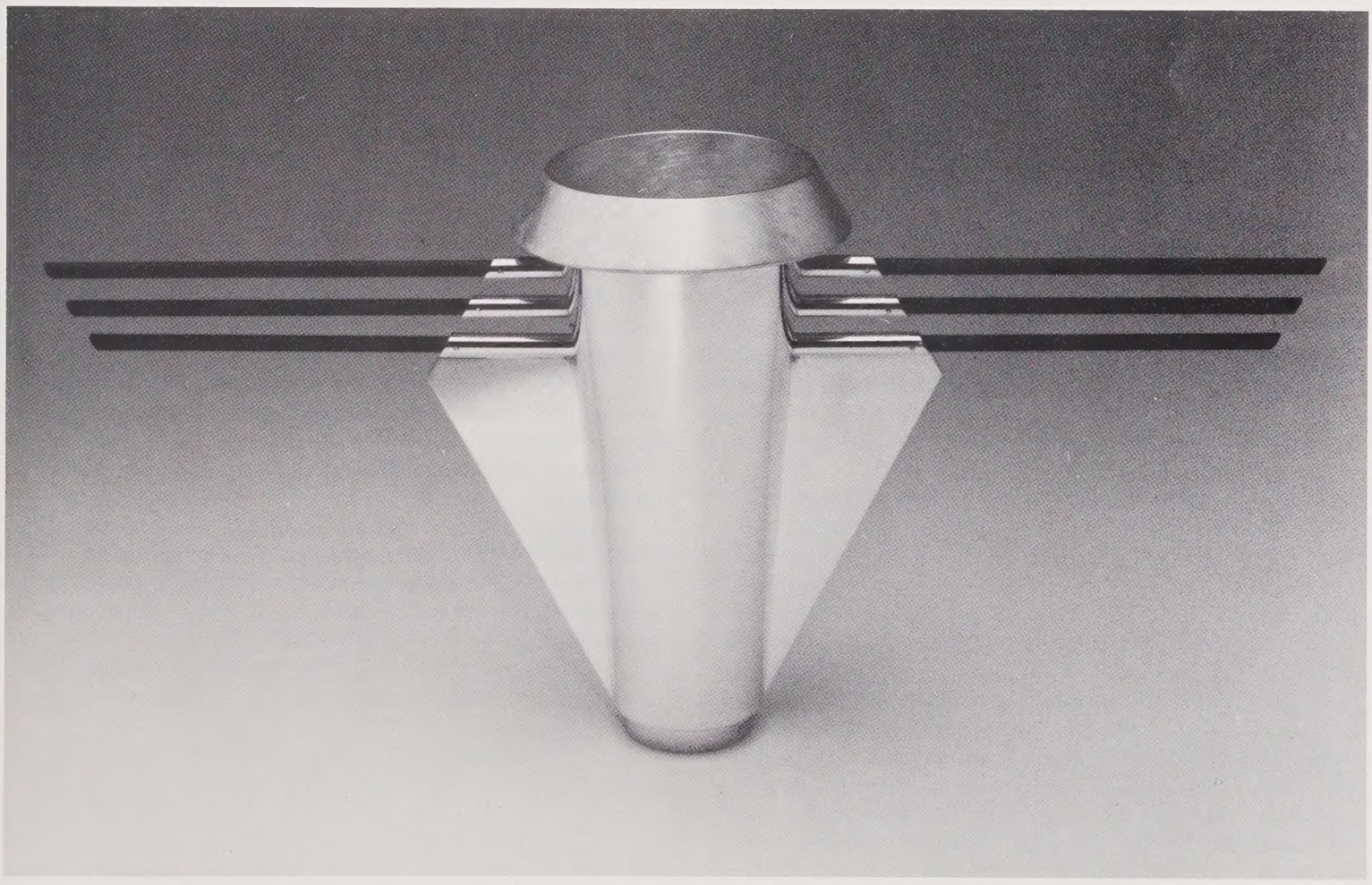
Debra Stoner's untitled vessel, given an honorable mention, might have been a perfect blend of art and function (as an elegant, fringed, footed fruit dish) except that she tipped it toward art by scattering tiny metal beads across the bowl. Gina Westergard's *Eternity* teapot is another that favors expressive form – and how sinuously, erotically, the almost dematerialized lucite handle coils around the cool contours of the silver pot.

Strangely, it's only among the invited entries that one sees virtuous conceits, the most egregious of which is Robert Ebendorf's pedestal platter pimpled with mounted pebbles and bottle glass. Mostly the invited works are classic forms (Heikki Seppä's spiraling *Object in Silver*, or elaborately worked out static images (Linda Threadgill's miniaturized architectural trophy). The show would have made more of a statement without them.

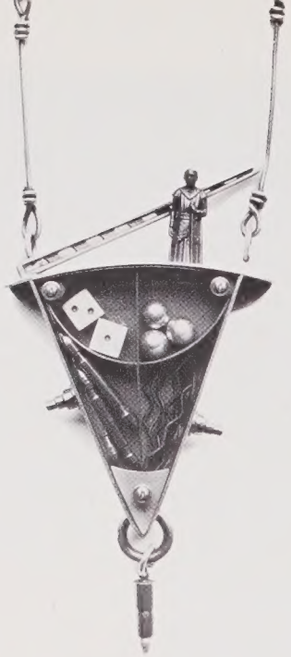
Janet Koplos writes frequently about three-dimensional objects.



Kevin Costello, *Cradle and Foundation: Self-Sustainment,* plate series #10, 3 x 12 x 12"



Boris Bally, *Kalimba,* 5 x 18 x 9"



War Odds Necklace
silver, brass, nickel, bronze, found objects/materials, 4.1 x .25 x 2.25".
Photo: David Caras

Collage Chair, electrical tape, copper foil, aluminum wire, aluminum, Plexiglas, 31 x 18.5", 1990. Photo: David Caras

Thomas Mann: New Work

Mobilia Gallery, Cambridge, MA
October 6 – November 2, 1990

by Anne Crowley Tom

Thomas Mann's recent work on view at Mobilia Gallery in Cambridge strongly reflects the influences of early 20th-century modern art. The range of work represents Mann's new direction as a designer and sculptor, described by the artist as "experimental," and inclined towards larger-scale, wearable and nonwearable pieces.

Reminiscent of Russian Constructivist and assemblage art are three one-of-a-kind necklaces, miniature sculpture-boxes that reflect Mann's role not only as a jeweler and metalsmith but as a major force in the 20th-century craft movement as it relates to 20th-century art. Like Joseph Cornell's boxes, which often reflected a romantic fascination for science in post-Victorian America, they contain an assortment of small products of technology. One of these necklaces, inscribed with the title *War Odds*, with its focus on geometry and the interplay of forms, recalls Alexander Rodchenko's constructions. Mann, who states that his works "always tell a story" but "form takes precedence" in his selection of subject matter, has isolated manmade shapes of plastic toys and found objects in the quadrants of a squat triangular box of sterling silver.

Like contemporary metalsmith Anton Cepka who, in Mann's words, "breaks trust with the concept of precious metals," Mann relies upon design to achieve his artistic solutions, using silver, bronze and nickel in combination with found materials. In the upper left-hand quadrant are dice fabricated from micarta, which the artist uses as a substitute for ivory. The upper right cell holds three stainless steel balls, while in the lower right are twists of iron wire giving the impression of barbed wire. The left cell contains objects resembling bullets, repeating the bullet shape of the dangle composed of bronze, copper and silver, hanging from the bottom of the box. On top of the box sits a miniature cast-in-bronze Babylonian warrior in front of what appears to be a horizontal barrier from a miniature train set. Each subdivision separately and in relation to the whole prompts political narrative in form, color and texture.

Another important new medium for Mann is furniture, which is represented here by a side chair constructed from the same range of metals, manmade materials and found objects used in his other sculpture. His new furniture is exemplary of "Techno-Romantic," the name Mann coined for his style of juxtaposing modern technological processes and materials (such as color xerography, new techniques in photography, contemporary found and fabricated objects) with classic romantic imagery. In this piece, Mann contrasts dreamlike, narrative subject matter with the materials of this generation. The sketch from which he worked on the chair (exhibited with it) indicates the range of technologically influenced processes involved in its construction. From it, we see how surface design is created with space-age materials: electrical tape, copper foil, eight-gauge aluminum wire wrapped around the front legs, binding wire on the base structure. With arms of ¼" perforated aluminum, a back of plexiglass slab, and under the plexiglass seat a clock collage that evokes Kurt Schwitters's assemblages with surreal imagery from the earliest part of the century, this piece embodies the Techno-Romantic style grown to new dimensions.

Anne Crowley Tom is a freelance writer based in Manhattan. An art historian and former director of education for the California Museum of Science and Industry, she has a particular interest in the relationship between art and technology.

Right
Ancient Voyage, steel, prisma color, paint sticks and patina, fabricated, 72 x 56 x 17"
Photo: Ward V. Roe

Far right
Faun, copper, brass, gold leaf, prisma color and patina, die-formed and fabricated, 75 x 14 x 14"
Collection: Peter Hoffer. Photo: Ward V. Roe

Robert Griffith
The Belin Works

Marywood College Contemporary Gallery, Scranton, PA
December, 1990

by Matt Povse and Sandra Ward

Robert Griffith's new body of work, made in the last year under a grant from the F. Lammot Belin Arts Scholarship Foundation, is a collage of color, line, form and materials, amalgamated with adventurous metal-working techniques and carefree storytelling. The unconventional surface treatments make the metal fabrication enigmatic. To realize that they are not wood, cast paper or clay, for example, commands a respect for Griffith's technical prowess and an appreciation for his audacity towards the material itself.

At times, the color is strong and penetrating, as in *Caldron* in which the patina is manipulated. In *Faun* and *Sentinel Vessel*, painterly color, achieved through paint sticks and prismacolor, is elusive and whispery, sparked by gold leaf. In *Ancient Voyage*, the colors of the raw metal are so well integrated with the greens and browns of the applied prismacolors that it is difficult to discern one area from the other.

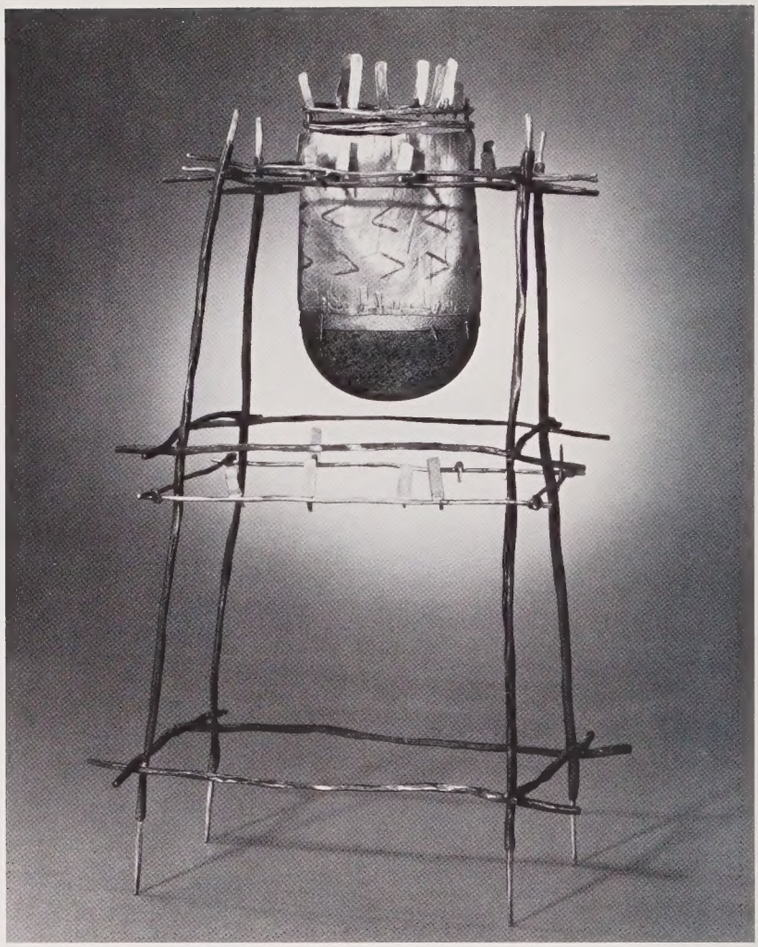
Like the color, Griffith's lines are independently successful yet held together by the strong profiles of the various shapes that comprise the total image. These profiles are gestural and familiar and host the other symbiotic lines that may be naive, humorous, mysterious. Line manifests itself as drawn prismacolor strokes; raised stick-arc lines depict trees, animals, scenes; wavy, wispy lines cut through the metal with a plasma-arc cutter; large, curved lines are fabricated onto other components of the sculpture; enamel paint has been applied to produce swirled, brushed lines. His line is never static. The composite use of various lines in each sculpture heightens the unpredictability.

The forms that are the vehicles for the line and color are mostly "stacked" volumes. They evoke images of pre-Columbian clay vessels (*Ritual Vessel II*), and the bronze ritual vessels of the Zhou Dynasty (*Caldron*). The spirit of chalices, ciboriums, reliquaries and other ceremonial/religious vessels, perhaps made from fine metals encrusted with jewels, is present. Primal images flicker across the mind as one associates *Faun*, *Ritual Vessel I*, *Ancient Altar*, *Sentinel Vessel* and *Testimonial* to cave paintings or shamanistic rituals. The totemlike shapes are reminiscent of Romanian grave markers, or possibly Brancusi. Such is the wide spectrum of Griffith's deliberate allusions.

This body of Griffith's work has evolved from jewelry/metalsmithing roots with its recognizable techniques and images, but the scale is different and unique. Here we have mysterious objects and symbols that could be carried by hand and placed on the table or altar, to ward off spirits or record certain events. Instead, Griffith's sculptures tower above us and confront us from an aggressive position of dominance.

Matt Povse is an instructor at Marywood College (Ceramics, 3-D Design) in Scranton, PA, where he also lives, and is former executive director of Peters Valley Craft Center.

Sandra Ward is assistant director of Peters Valley Craft Center, Layton, NJ, where she also lives, and was the textile resident for seven years.



The Glorified Goblet

Signature Gallery, Boston, MA
July 1 – August 15, 1990

by Susan Barahal

Drinking vessels are ubiquitous objects. Their need is universal and they can be made in a variety of materials and multitude of shapes. Excavations have unearthed simple forms dating from the Stone Age, precious gold vessels from the Scythian civilization, sophisticated glasses from ancient Persia and Rome and narrative painted clay cups from ancient Greece.

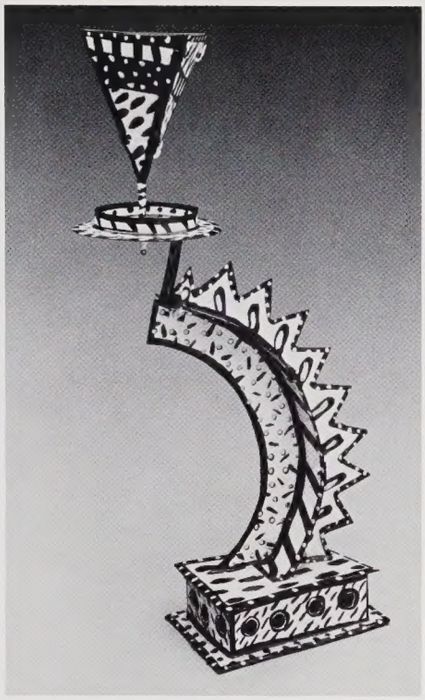
Of all the forms that drinking vessels can take, the goblet is perhaps the most elegant. Goblets are distinguished from cups and glasses by their width and capacity. Historically, the large bowl portion had no handles and sat upon a stemmed foot. Some were elaborately decorated and their large size enabled the goblet to be passed among guests for drinking a toast in celebration. Often, the stem would be heavily carved in order to prevent the goblet from slipping through unsteady fingers. Today the term goblet is used loosely for any large drinking glass, although goblets are primarily reserved for celebrations and are usually associated with ceremony and festivity.

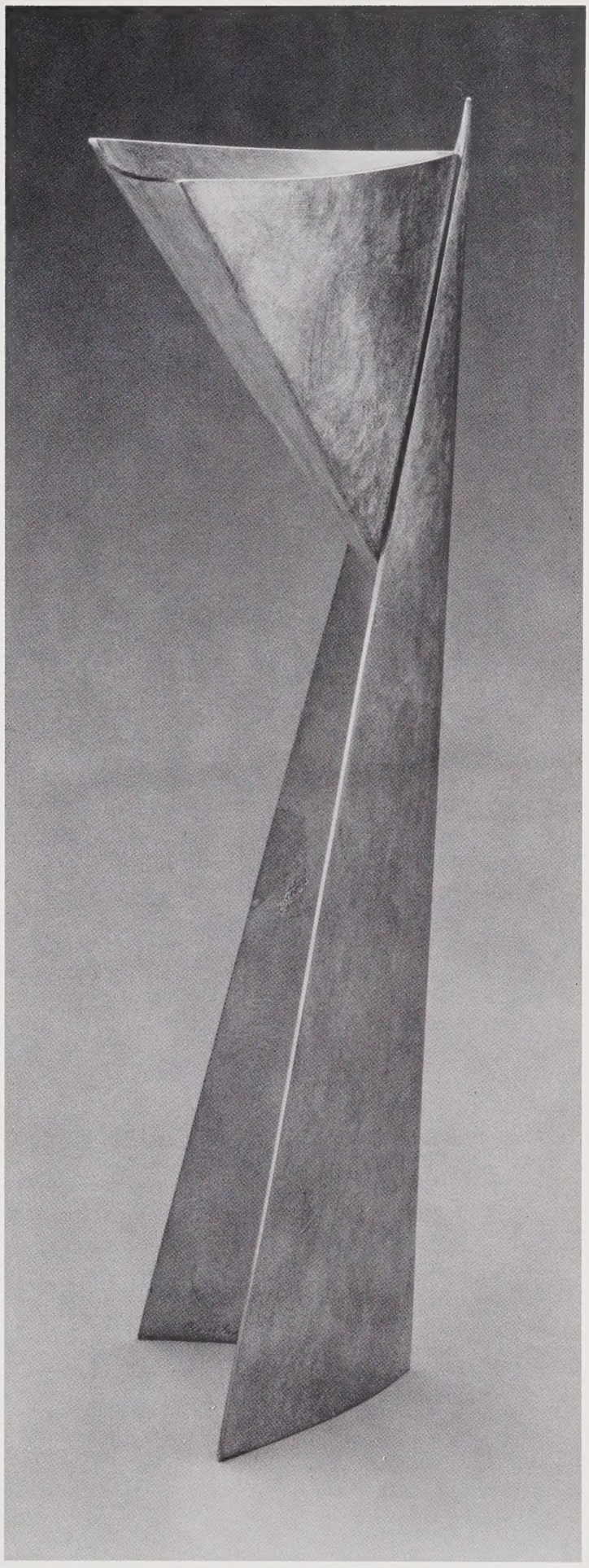
Signature Gallery in Boston, Massachusetts recently celebrated the goblet as an art form in an exhibition and competition entitled "The Glorified Goblet." More than 80 artists working in a wide variety of mediums submitted pieces of extraordinary diversity and ingenuity. Each artist created art forms that expressed a personal interpretation of the concept of goblet. Most striking was the number of entries that were entirely nonfunctional as goblets or, for that matter, as any kind of drinking vessel. Over half of the works were nonfunctional, and a number of those that could be used were impractical and problematic as vessels. Clearly, functionality was not a primary concern to the majority of the artists.

Nor was functionality a concern of the judges. The goblet awarded "Best of Show" was a nonfunctional piece by Carolyn Morris Bach entitled *Chalice for a Woodland God.* Bach's choice and rendering of materials simultaneously convey feelings of primitivism and preciousness. The vessel form combines silver, copper and 18k gold, and includes a beach stone that has been polished to a high gloss and bezel-set like the finest cabochon ruby. The pouched-shaped vessel rests on an altar fabricated from forged and soldered wires, suggesting sticks that have been lashed in place. Sue Robert's goblet also sits atop an assembled structure. All elements are attached pieces of enameled sheet-metal and the form is an innovative variation of the traditional goblet – a bowl on a stemmed foot. Like the Bach piece, it functions as a free-standing sculpture, but Robert's vessel is whimsical, playful and amusing. The black-and-white markings are not meticulously painted but are, rather, executed in an intuitive and childlike manner reminiscent of Jean Dubuffet's decorated sculptures.

One is easily intrigued by Robert Stephan's blown-glass goblet. Stephan fuses multiple layers of precious metallic oxides to the surface of the glass, causing the surface to reflect varying wavelengths of light and, therefore, multiple colors. The result is what the artist refers to as dichroic (meaning two colors) glass, since one color becomes another when the light changes or the viewer moves. Colors and patterns continually shift, transforming the goblet into a hologram.

At first glance, Christine O'Leary's goblet, although tiny, appears to be utilitarian. However, it is so delicate that one is afraid to even touch it. The bowl portion is a gold-leaf eggshell that is attached to a paper stemmed foot. Its fragility demands special treatment and communicates a sense of preciousness.





Since goblets are familiar objects usually reserved for special use, many of us have associations and identifications with these forms, recalling celebrations, rituals, milestones and transitions. The goblet becomes a symbol of these events and its symbolic role can be more significant than the vessel's potential functionality. In fact, the goblet that is not at all functional as a drinking vessel can perhaps be more powerful as a symbol of ritual than a goblet from which one can drink. Stripped of its utilitarian function, its purpose becomes entirely that of symbol and sculpture, allowing it to transcend the confines and limitations of definitions such as "drinking vessel." By creating objects that we think of as only serving a particular useful function and rendering them "useless," artists like those in the "Glorified Goblet" force us to pay attention to the object as symbol and form. We are obligated to rethink and reevaluate our preconceived ideas about familiar objects.

Susan Barahal is the decorative arts editor for Art New England *and teaches art in the Boston area.*

Left to right

Christine O'Leary, *Goblets*, 22k gilded eggshell with paper stem, 4.5 x 1.5"

Carolyn Morris Bach, *Chalice for a Woodland God*, sterling silver, 18k gold, copper, beach stone, 10 x 6 x 5". Photo: Ned Manter

Sue Roberts, *Goblet*, enameled sheet metal, 16 x 6". Photo: Dean Powell

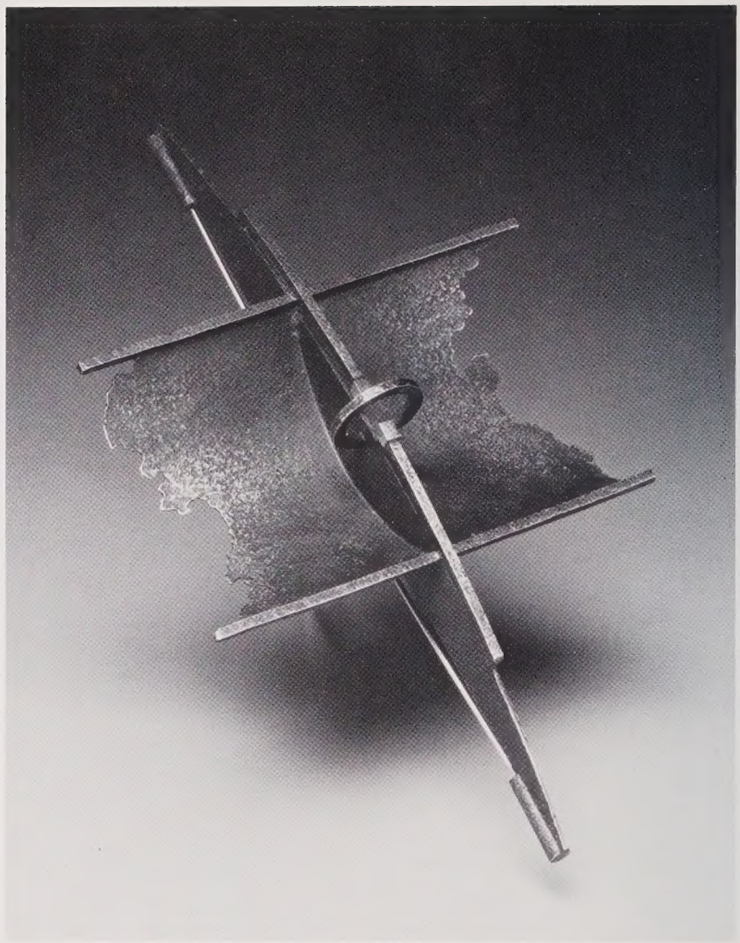
Cynthia Eid, *Goblet*, brushed pewter, 9.5 x 2.5". Photo: Dean Powell

Left to right

Joe Wood, *Arc* brooch, sterling silver, 18k gold, 5 x 2.5 x .75", 1989
Photo: Dean Powell

Dan Jocz, *Three Rings*, nickel, polymer clay, pigments, metallic leafs
Photo: Dean Powell

Lisa Spiros, *Pendant* (detail), black steel, black steel cable



Jewelries / Epiphanies

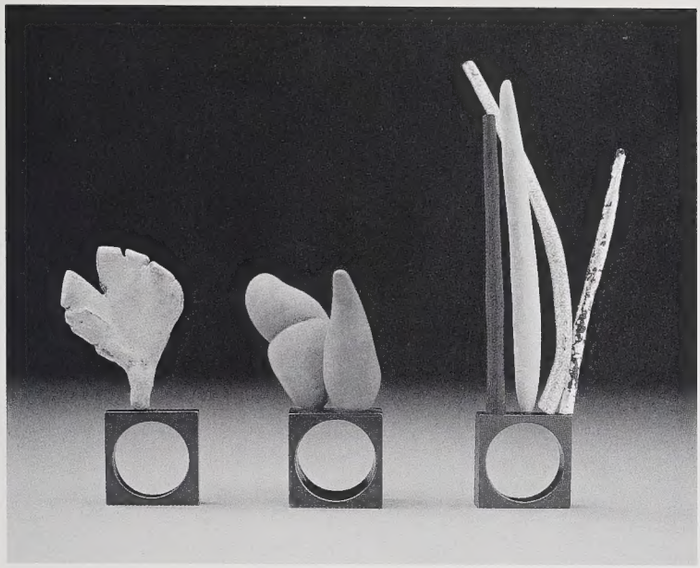
Artists Foundation, Boston, MA
September 4 – October 18, 1990

by Edward S. Cooke, Jr.

Jewelry has traditionally been defined in terms of decorative effect, precious materials and fashion, Design economics for necklaces, rings, pins and other bodily armatures have often been determined by wearability, appropriateness for use, precious metals and gems and time-consuming workmanship. In the 1920s, Modernists took the first steps in challenging the parameters of this traditional view. They sought to use commonplace materials and to work within a minimal philosophy that aspired to a timelessness that transcended style. Although graduates of American art and design schools from the 1950s through much of the 1970s continued the time-honored notion of decorative jewelry in different styles, studio jewelers during the past decade have sought an alternative, ecumenical route. Instead of rejecting tradition, they have built upon the history of jewelry, including the exploration of the Modernists, to bring new energy to jewelry forms. Combining precious materials with minimal designs, using the materials as well as the forms to engage the wearer or viewer, exploring the relationship among weight, scale and materials, making narrative statements, or using the forms to explore new notions of function, contemporary jewelers have staked out new terrain.

"Jewelries/Epiphanies" demonstrated how far some jewelers have pushed the field. The concept for the exhibition took shape about two years ago when a group of Boston-area jewelers and metalsmiths shared their frustrations about the lack of opportunities to exhibit thoughtful or provocative work. Helen Drutt Gallery and Rezac Gallery showed such jewelry, but most galleries favored commercial work and displayed it crowded into horizontally oriented cases more appropriate for department stores. The Boston-area artists, led by Daniel Jocz, formed a group called MARS, an acronym for Metalsmith Arts Resource Society that also suggests a militancy about their commitment to thoughtful work. MARS presented an exhibition proposal to the Artist Foundation, but not until late 1989 was there interest. At that time Barbara Baker, the new director of the foundation, and Catherine Mayes, the curator, expressed an interest in the small sculptural work. They accepted the MARS proposal submitted by Jocz and Joe Wood and suggested that the exhibition include other artists. Linked by a common goal to present work that transcended sales restraints, that was jewelry for the mind and eye as well as the body, Jocz, Wood and Mayes developed an exhibition that expanded "the notion of jewelry beyond ideas of decoration" and presented it as "portable works of art."

The three curators picked 17 artists from New England and New York to participate. Each artist was represented by 10 objects. Taken together the work in the show documents several of the directions in studio jewelry and points out certain regional patterns. Many who work in New York have continued in the Modernist tradition. Eva Eisler's geometric stainless steel forms, joined with cold interlocking connection, are a contemporary expression of constructivism. Pavel Opocensky models his geometrically shaped pieces of Colorcore laminate to produce alluring brooches that posses a tactile richness. Using commonplace materials such as stainless steel and steel cable, Lisa Spiros constructs necklaces that challenge our perceptions of size and weight. The large hollow pendants are actually very light, an ambiguity that parallels the ambiguity in materials. A slightly different minimalism is evident in the work of RISD graduates. Didi Suydam and Sandra Enterline both employ precious materials to construct stylized forms or combinations of forms. The continued influence of Jack Prip is evident in the slightly abstract conceptualization of these pieces, as well as in the scratch finish. Joan Parcher, another Rhode Island jeweler, has taken this philosophy in a new, exciting direction by using graphite pendants, a heavier than expected element that leaves a mark on the wearer and shrinks irreversibly with use.



Of the Massachusetts artists, Susan Hamlet, Claire Sanford, Alan Burton Thompson and Jill Slosburg-Ackerman address issues of figure and narrative. For this exhibition, Hamlet submitted two series of flat brooches in which robotlike profiles were juxtaposed with different interior voids. In the "Four Seasons" series, she narrates a personal story, beginning with a fissure in the fall, which becomes a ghostly figure in the winter, a more humanlike figure in the spring and a young woman in the summer. Sanford, on the other hand, produced a series of brooches that became increasingly frail in body, but bright in small decorative detail near the top. The making of this series coincided with her brother's battle with AIDS. Combining found materials with precious materials and mounting them on carved basswood, Burton Thompson provides material vignettes that evoke past events or emotions and demand engagement. Slosburg-Ackerman uses asymmetrical pairs and triads of natural and fabricated forms to explore relationships of life and death, exterior and interior structure, time specificity and timelessness, natural and artificial. Joe Wood uses a less naturalistic language to address similar issues of temporal gradation and age. His constructions are sparse but not really minimal, with a fine sense of detailing and patination to reinforce the temporal and rhythmic concepts of his forms. Two artists pushed the boundaries of function. Boris Bally employs precious materials and elaborate techniques to create disturbingly dysfunctional or aggressive pieces. The resulting works possess considerable physical and conceptual tension. Dan Jocz's rings, plain geometric bases with colorful protuberances mounted on them, embody a whole new perspective on defining function. Their use is extremely limited: the rings are not really wearable, the fragile, fugitive paints will wear off over time, and the rings act more as pedestals. Nevertheless, like carnivals, they serve as fanciful celebrations that turn the normal order upside down and therefore affirm traditional boundaries of cultural expression.

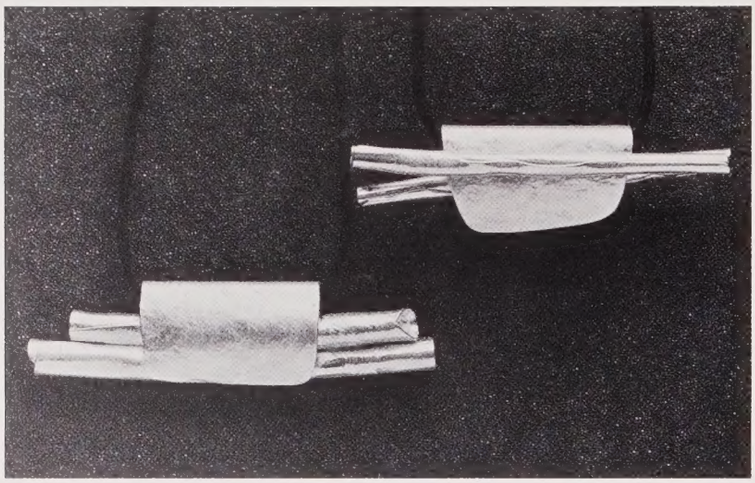
Accompanying the show were two educational components that provided invaluable interpretive material. The catalog features an essay by James Ackerman that addresses new concepts of function, particularly in regard to scale and use of materials, and an essay by Sarah Bodine and Michael Dunas that points out the continued persistence of a minimal way of working. While Ackerman's observations shed special light upon the non-New York work, the second essay helps to explain the shared perspective of the New York school, one that is not unique to the world of jewelry. The furniture shown at Art et Industrie, for example, reveals the same persistence of minimal approaches, interest in weight and perceptions of weight, and emphasis on surfaces. The catalog also illustrates at least one piece by each artist and included a short biography of each artist.

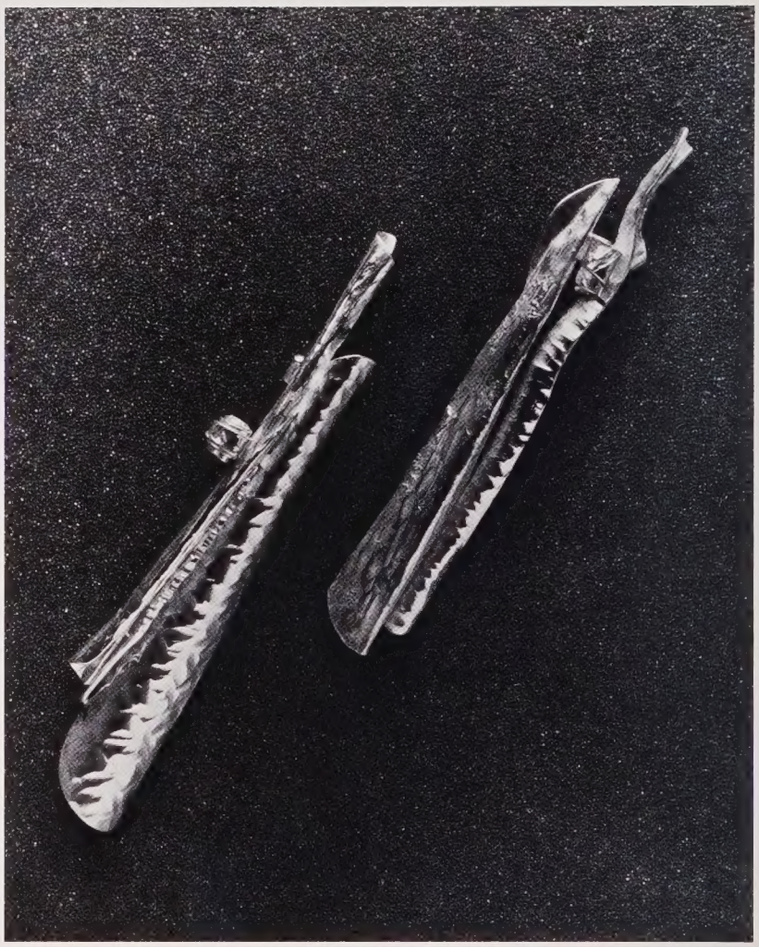
An artists' forum, in which I participated, was another essential interpretive component. Nine of the 17 artists explicated their ideas, methods of working and choices for the exhibition to other jewelers and students. The chance to discuss intent and performance was indeed exciting, but it also emphasized the importance of properly presenting content-laden jewelry. The objects speak as themselves but not for themselves. Titles can often be helpful as in the case of Hamlet's work, but also they can be cryptic. Complex verbiage, like a lack of wearability, does not automatically mean conceptual content. For this exhibition, even the use of the word epiphanies as defined on the text panel in the show – "a manifestation of perception of the essential nature of something, a single and striking intuitive grasp of reality" – seemed pedantic, intellectual posturing. Clear, explanatory narrative text, as short as five or six sentences, would greatly enhance a viewer's understanding and evaluation of concept and execution. While the curators used blown-up photographs of Bally's, Parcher's and Jocz's work to provide some sense of context, artists and curators should devote more attention to the interpretation of their objects. Through short labels, arrangement of a series or new technologies such as videodiscs, we need to better explicate the strong but often mute objects for both colleagues and the general public.

The Artists Foundation and the three curators should be applauded for this pathbreaking exhibit and its related programming, all achieved with a very modest budget. One can quibble with certain flaws: the inclusion of several drawings isolated by themselves in a back corner of the space, suggesting their role was an afterthought; Thomas Gentille's decision to send older, less adventurous work; and the appropriateness of John Iversen's cast production work. But the overall effect was very positive. The exhibition has provided needed energy and reflection to the field of studio jewelry, yet is has also pointed out the difficulties of organizing and interpreting it. It should prove exciting to see how future shows will be organized and how jewelers and curators discuss such issues as changing social boundaries for function or the difference between fabrication, assembly and manipulation.

Edward S. Cooke, Jr. is associate curator of American Decorative Arts and Sculpture at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

The catalog of this show is available from Artists Foundation, 8 Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116. "Jewelries/Epiphanies" travels to the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague, Czechoslovakia February 21 – March 24, 1991.





John Baltrushunas
White Winter

Pro-Art, St. Louis, MO
November 17 – December 31, 1990

by Teresa Callahan

The theme of this show was jewelry that reflects visual qualities typically associated with the winter season. The visual drama is achieved by the omnipresence of icy sterling silver. Although all of the pieces echo nature, a mood is conveyed that elevates this work beyond mere imitation or representation.

When addressed individually, each piece is a composition of several constructed elements and hollow segments. The artist relies heavily on textural variation, achieved through hammers, subtle roll-imprinting and fiber techniques. The craftsmanship, deliberately neither sophisticated nor crude, imbues each piece with a memorable sensitivity and spirit that would not exist if the maker's hand were not evident.

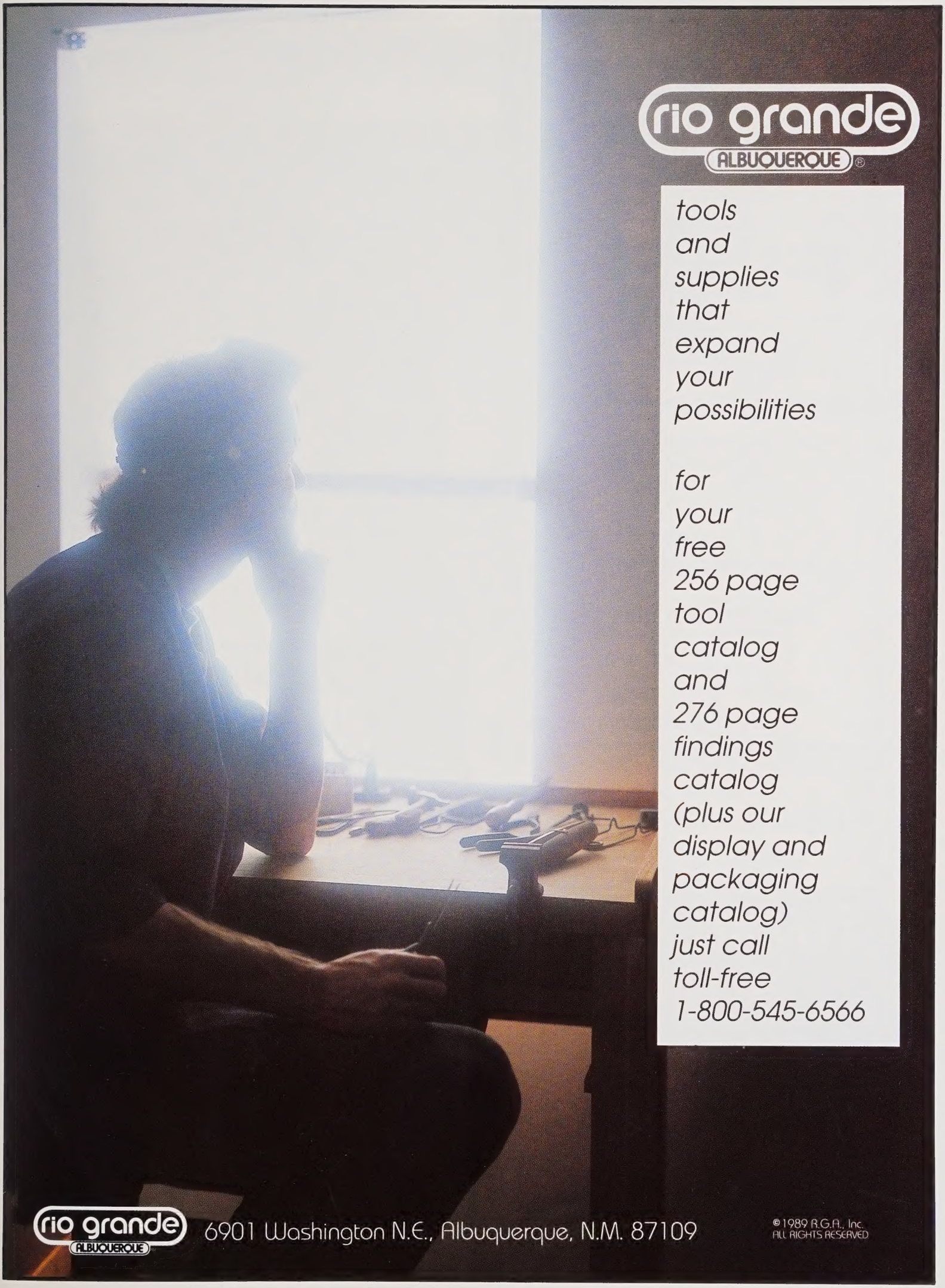
Of particular success are the pendants, *Snow and Branches I and II* – splendid examples of cocoonlike vertical forms, replete with undulating curves and wrapping sinews that seem to promise a future metamorphosis. Stark, deceptively simple exteriors capture a peculiar grace that echos the nature reference.

The pins of the "Eternal Promise" series are more reminiscent of the artist's earlier work in their personal geometry and juxtaposition. It is significant that he has worked extensively with patinas, colorations and aerospace metals for the past decade. This refined exhibition of silver marks a return to a certain classic sensibility for Baltrushunas. Perhaps like winter itself, it shelters a new beginning.

Teresa Callahan is a writer living in St. Louis.

Above left
Branches and Snow pendants, fine and sterling silver, approx. 3 x .75"
Photo: Michael Holohan

Above
Eternal Promise Series pins, fine and sterling silver
Photo: Michael Holohan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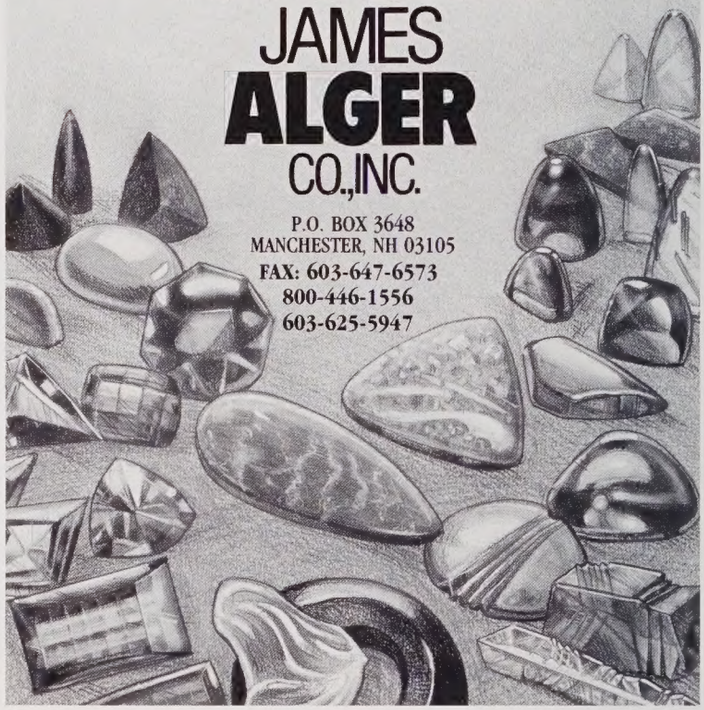

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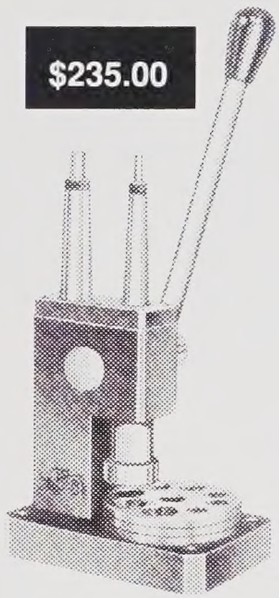

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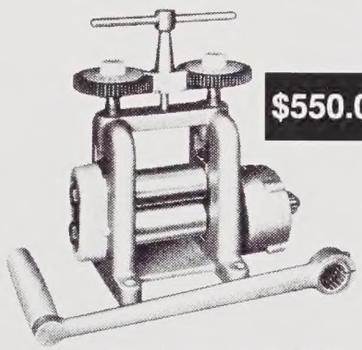

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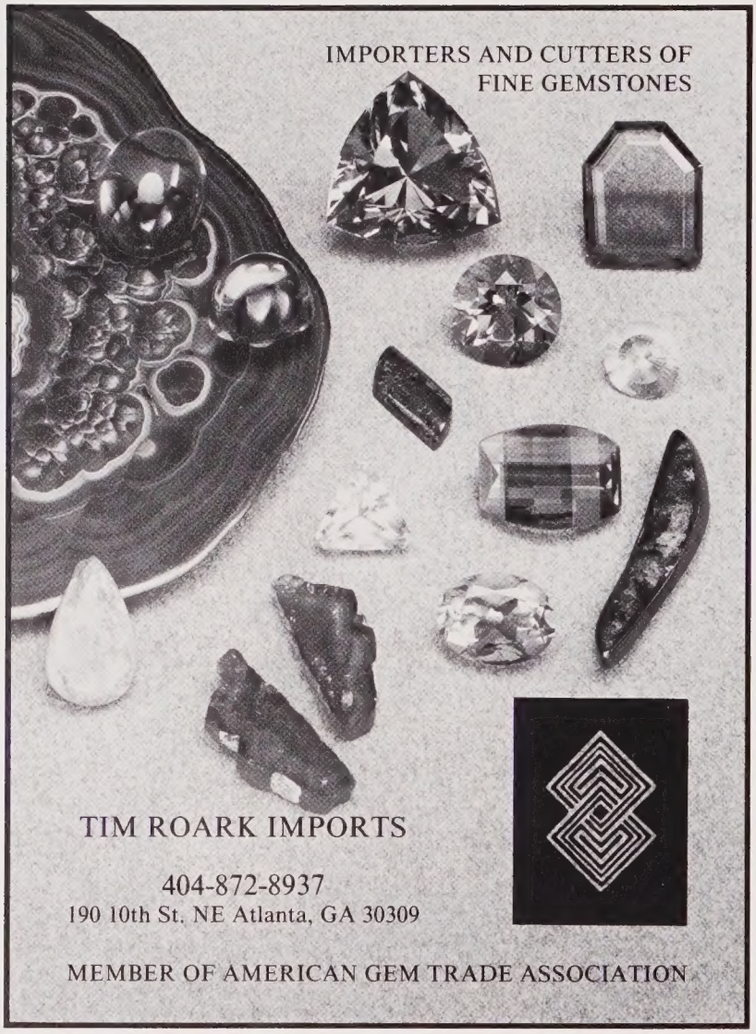
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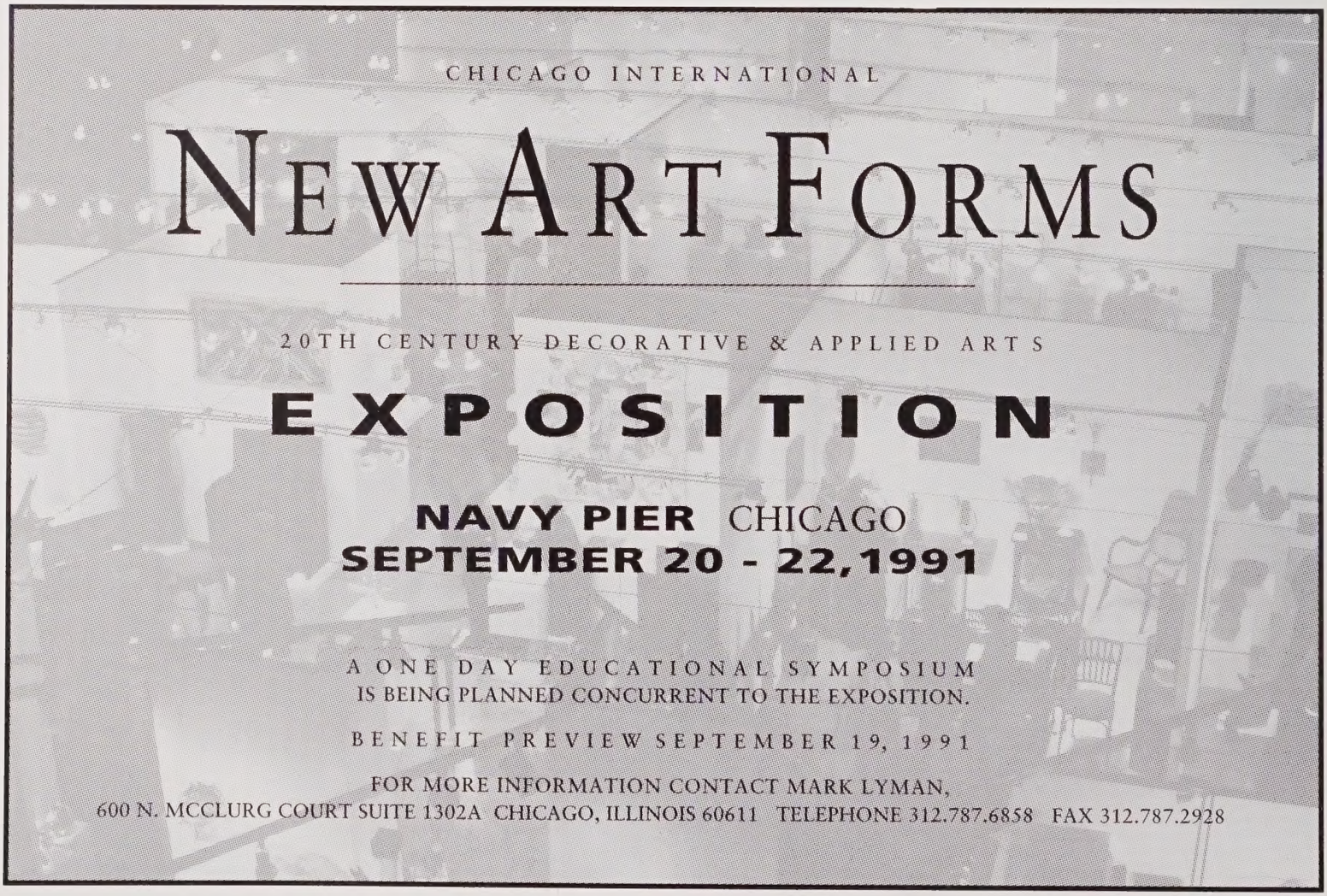
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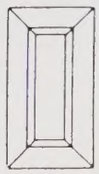
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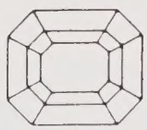
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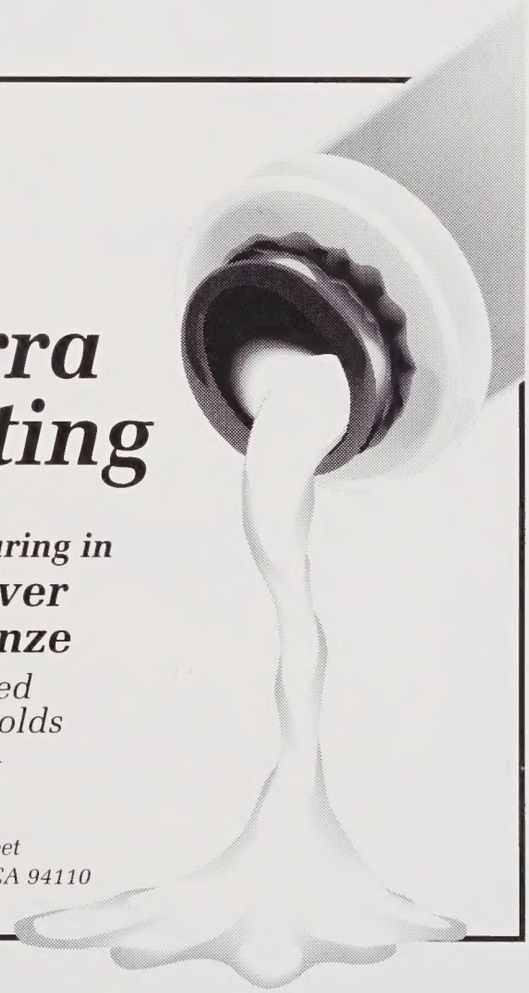

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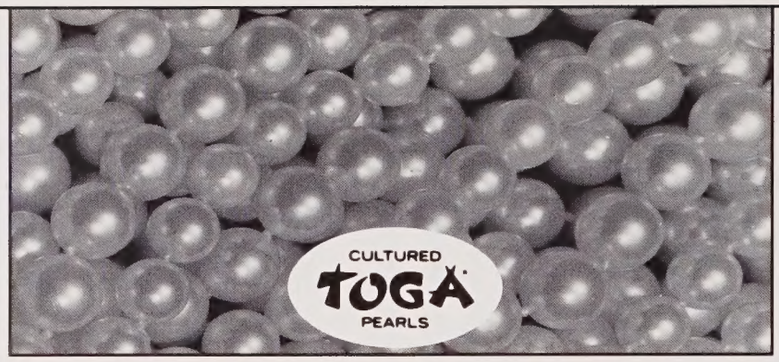

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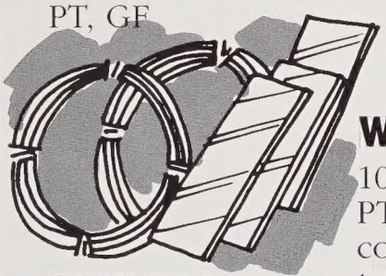

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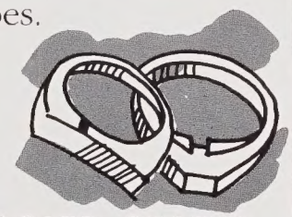

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Membership
The Society of North American Goldsmiths

The Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG) was formed in 1970 to promote contemporary metalwork and jewelry. Through its publications, services and advocacy, SNAG serves the fine art and jewelry communities. SNAG's publications and conferences provide technical information and critical insight to practitioners and teachers of metalwork. Professional metalsmiths, students, collectors, gallery owners and enthusiasts make up the dynamic mix of the Society.

Services

The Society's annual conference provides a forum for the exchange of many points of view. Speakers of national recognition offer stimulating discourse on a range of topics. Members of the Society attend the conference at reduced rates.

The Society sponsors important exhibitions of contemporary metalwork. Past SNAG shows have been mounted at the Renwick Gallery, the St. Paul Museum of Art and several galleries in New York City. These exhibitions are usually restricted to members only.

The Society maintains an audio-visual library, which contains the portfolios of Distinguished Members and other notable metalsmiths. Members can rent slides, films and videotapes at a nominal cost.

The Society operates a discount book service, through which important texts on all aspects of the field can be ordered at a reduced price.

Publications

Metalsmith is the only magazine in America devoted solely to the metal arts. Please see the reverse side of this page for a detailed description of this exciting magazine. Membership in the Society includes a subscription to *Metalsmith.*

The *SNAG Newsletter* is published bimonthly and is available to members only. It features timely information on exhibitions, workshops, conferences and job opportunities throughout North America.

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The Society offers several types of memberships, each tailored to a specific level of involvement in the field of contemporary metalsmithing.

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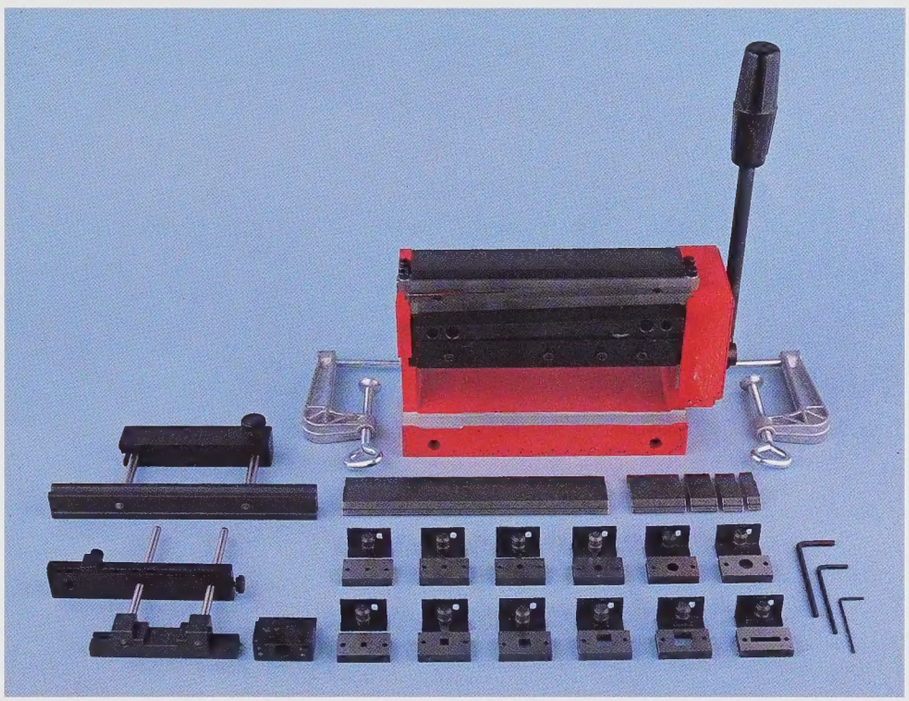

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